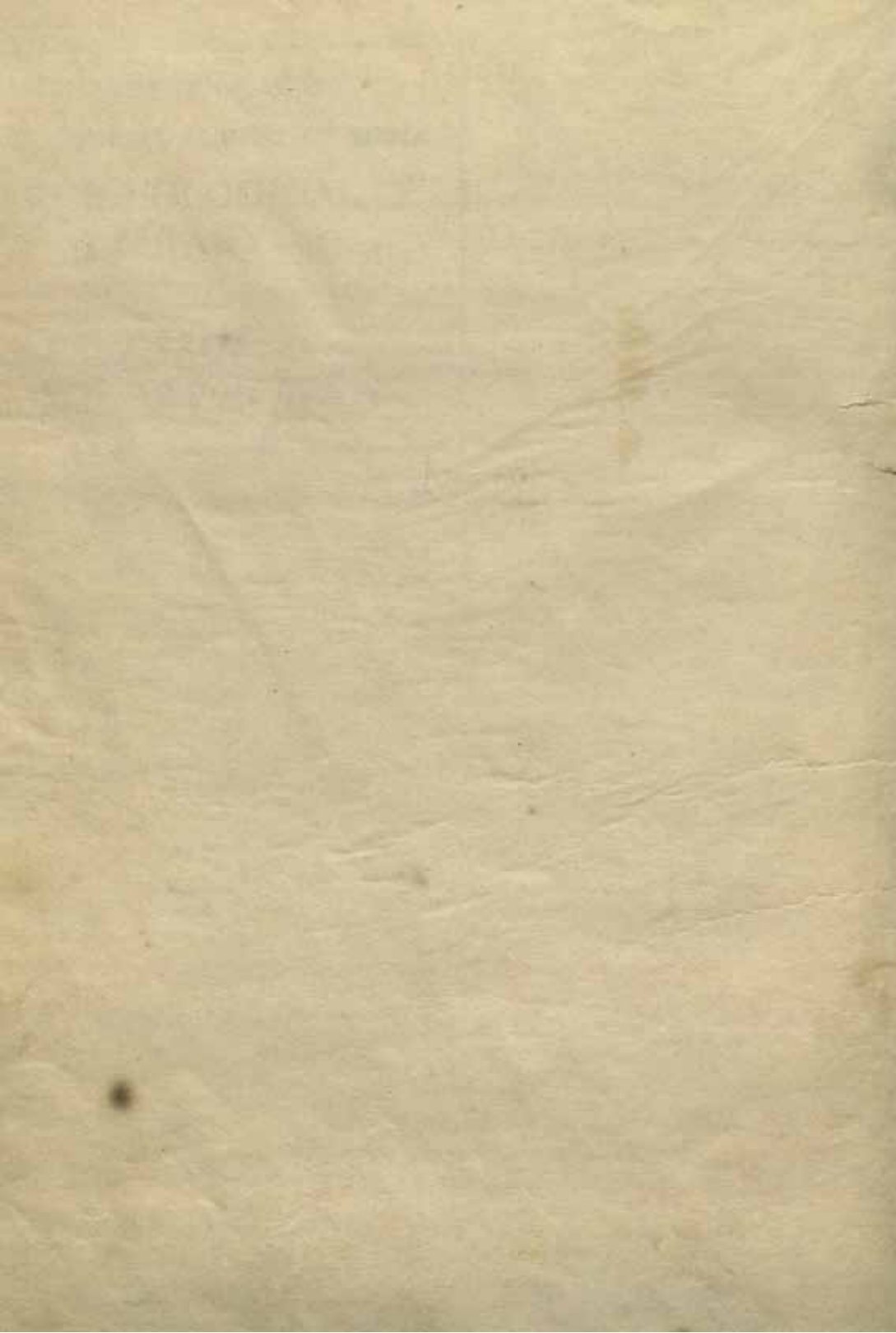


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REMAINS OF THE BHARHUT STŪPA
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PART I

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Dedicated
to
The August Memory
of
Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy
The Great Pioneer
in the field of
Studies on
Indian Art

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FOREWORD

The Bharhut Gallery is at once the pride and a wondrous introductory chapter of the rich art and archaeological collection of the sprawling multipurpose Indian Museum in Calcutta ; this is the gallery that welcomes and leads the visitor to the rich treasures of the Museum.

By the time Cunningham discovered the ruins of the Bharhut *stūpa* in 1873-74 little had remained of it except on its south-east face, but whatever did Cunningham recovered and removed to the Indian Museum. This was in 1875. Some stray pieces which still lay buried there were also recovered later and removed eventually to the same Museum. But quite a few, recovered still later and from time to time, found their way to a few other museums in India and abroad. The fact remains, however, that if one has to form an idea of what the *stūpa* was like with its elaborate gateways and railings, one must go to the Indian Museum since nothing remains any more at the village of Bharhut except perhaps the thousands of bricks that had gone to the building of about two hundred and odd structures of the village.

The basic text in regard to the remains of the Bharhut *stūpa*, its gate, railings and the rich array of relief sculpture, is still the voluminous descriptive report of Cunningham¹. Since then these remains have been studied in parts, aspects and segments by several scholars, the reliefs and the short votive and label inscriptions engaging, very legitimately, much more attention, relatively speaking. Nanigopal Majumdar who was at one time in charge of the Archaeological Section of the Indian Museum, made a good though modest contribution in this regard², for instance. But much more detailed and meaningful work was done by Benimadhab Barua³.

The present monograph, in two parts, by Arabinda Ghosh, Deputy Keeper of the Archaeological Section of the Museum, is a continuation of the work initiated by Cunningham and carried forward by scholars like Barua, Majumdar and others. It was somewhat inevitable perhaps that Ghosh should have taken advantage of the work of his predecessors and trodden parts of the same ground, but, by and large, he has discussed and analysed aspects and themes which were not given adequate attention heretofore. And this he has done methodically and systematically, which has enabled

1. Cunningham, Alexander, *The Stūpa of Bharhut*, London, 1879.

2. Majumdar, N.G., *Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum*, Part I, Calcutta, 1937.

3. Barua, B.M., *Barhut*, Books I, II & III, Calcutta, 1934-37.

him to throw new light on many a point. He has also brought to bear upon his studies, in a modest but straightforward manner, a wider recognition of historical and ideational background of the motifs, symbols and legends on which students of Indian art and iconography are now somewhat better informed.

I feel the author has been able to carry forward and bring upto date our knowledge of this great monument of early Buddhism and of early Buddhist art and iconography.

New Delhi

1 June, 1978.

NIHARRANJAN RAY

PREFACE

The remains of the Railing and Gateway of the Bharhut Stūpa form one of the most important exhibits of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The sculptures and inscriptions engraved on these remains constitute some of the main sources for the reconstruction of the political, social, economic and cultural history of India during the second-first centuries B.C., when this monument was erected. The sculptures, which attract the attention of the visitors at the first glance for their unsophisticated but lyrical loveliness, appealing, as they do, directly to the popular sense of the beautiful and the divine, are of inestimable value; they form the main evidence for an evaluation of the artistic achievements of the Indian people during the period of their execution.

It should, however, be borne in mind that the Bharhut Stūpa is a monument raised for the glorification of Buddhism. As such, it forms one of the greatest evidence for the reconstruction of the history of Buddhism during the period of its construction. Attention of scholars has naturally been devoted to a great extent to the elucidation and identification of those sculptures which depicted scenes from Buddhist legend and history. Considerable work in this respect has been done by Cunningham¹ and Barua². But mere identification of the scenes with legends and traditions preserved in Buddhist scriptures, which attained the shape in which we find them much later than the monument of Bharhut was erected, does not help us much in getting an idea of Buddhism as it stood during the second-first centuries B. C. As a matter of fact, Barua's attempt to interpret all the Bharhut sculptures by reference to the Buddhist legends preserved in the scriptures has been severely criticized by Lüders³.

Buddhism began as a way of life and thought revealed to the Buddha for the attainment of salvation. In its pristine form this way of life and thought was in vogue amongst a few followers of the Teacher (*satthā*), who "wandered away into homelessness" and ultimately formed a monkish order (*saṅgha*). But as the way to salvation revealed to and promulgated by the Buddha was meant also for the benefit of the people at large, it did not and could not remain for long limited to a select few who walked after the Teacher. Soon a number of lay devotees (*upāsakas*) gathered around

1. Cunningham, A., *The Stupa of Bharhut*, London, 1879.

2. Barua, B. M., *Barhut*, Books I-III, Calcutta, 1934-37.

3. Lüders, H., *Bharhut und die buddhistische Literature*, pp. 1-19; *Bharhut Inscriptions, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. II, Part II, Ootacamund, 1963, pp. ix-xii.

the Lord and Master (*bhagavā*) and his followers, who heard their sermons and venerated them. The presence of these lay worshippers led to a great change in the doctrines and practices of Buddhism which may be designated as "popular Buddhism" in contradistinction to "monkish Buddhism" current in the *viḥāras* and *saṅghārāmas* of the *bhikṣus* governed by the doctrines of the law and the rules of discipline as codified in the *Dhamma-vinaya* promulgated by the Master.

The stūpas of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati etc. are, in reality, monuments raised for the glorification of this "popular Buddhism" current during the centuries immediately preceding and succeeding the Christian era. Much of popular belief and tradition about the sacred and the divine had to be incorporated into the pristine Buddhism of early days to make it attractive and intelligible to the people at large. Thus the rational doctrines promulgated by the Master gave way to and got mixed up with a religion of devotion (*bhakti*) and belief in the supramundane (*lokottara*) nature of the Lord (*bhagavat*) and his immediate disciples. Many of the popular gods and goddesses had to be allotted a place in this "popular Buddhism" as belief in them was ingrained in the ways and mores of the people at large, and could not be dispensed altogether.

The popular affiliation of much of the Bharhut sculpture is revealed by a large number of reliefs which depict the myths and legends current among the common people of the time. These sculptures harken back to a world of thought and belief which is very dissimilar from those we find in the earliest of the Buddhist scriptures. They in reality form the iconography of a primitive stratum of popular religion and mythology which may be designated as "Water Cosmology". Comparative studies in religion have shown that "Water Cosmology", that is a belief in the origin of the Universe (Cosmos) from the primeval waters, was current among many of the peoples of the ancient world, including India. This belief was so firm in the popular mind that it could not be dispensed with, and the Buddhists had to succumb to this popular impact.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to describe and elucidate the significance of some of the motifs and symbols of the iconography of "Water Cosmology" as they occurred on the Bharhut Railing and Gateway preserved in the Indian Museum. Pioneer work in this field has been done by the late A. K. Coomaraswamy⁴, and the author has followed in his footsteps. If this small volume may render a little help to scholars and students in their understanding of the so-called "decorative" reliefs of Bharhut, the author will find his efforts amply rewarded.

The present work was begun as a descriptive catalogue of the sculptures displayed in the Bharhut Gallery of the Indian Museum. But it soon dawned on me that mere description of the sculptures would serve no useful purpose. What is much more necessary is an interpretative description which would make the reader understand the significance of the sculptures to the best advantage. This led me to contemplate a

4. Coomaraswamy, A.K., *Yakṣas*, 2 Parts, Washington, 1927-31.

work on Bharhut in two parts, of which the present one (Part I) deals with the so-called "decorative" reliefs. In a future monograph (Part II) I propose to deal with the sculptures depicting scenes from Buddhist legend and history and the inscriptions.

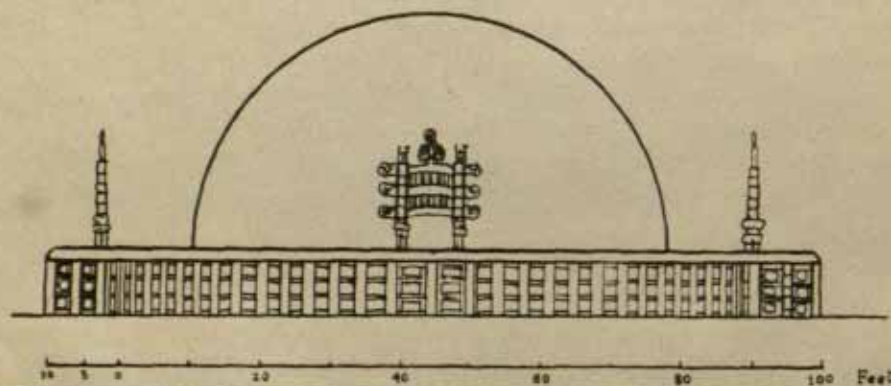
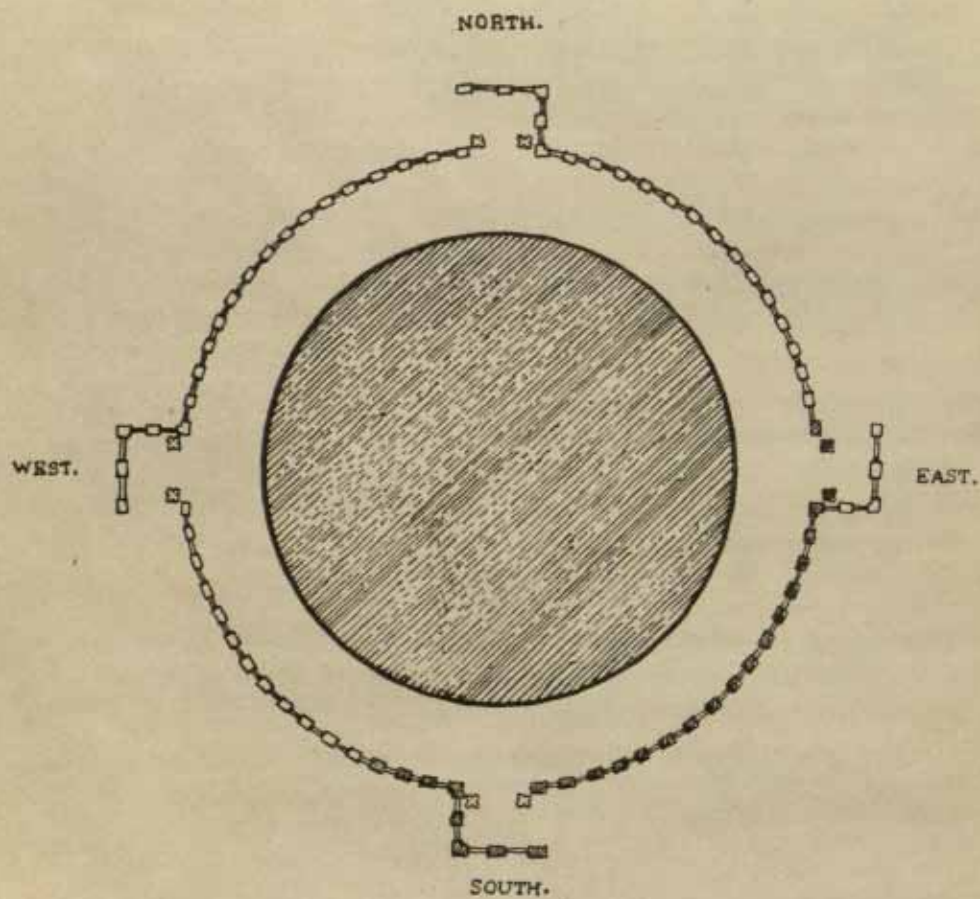
While publishing the monograph I avail myself of the opportunity to express my deep gratitude and reverence to my teacher Dr. Niharranjan Ray, formerly Bagisvari Professor of Fine Arts and Head of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University, who has been kind enough to go through the monograph, suggest corrections and improvements and also to write the Foreward introducing this insignificant work to the readers. I also remain beholden to Shri S. M. Bhattacharyya, Honorary Secretary to the Board of Trustees of the Museum, and to Dr. S. C. Ray, Director, Indian museum, for the interest they have taken towards the preparation and publication of the book.

It is a pleasant duty to acknowledge my debt to those of my colleagues who have helped me by their labours and advice in the preparation of the monograph. Miss Jayasri Lahiri, M. Sc., Guide Lecturer (Botany), has helped me in augmenting my meagre botanical knowledge by her explanations and in getting the drawings of botanical specimens illustrated in the monograph prepared. Shri Rathin Ray, artist, has prepared all the line drawings on Figs. 1, 2, and 3 and also the cover design. Photographs of sculptures illustrated in the Plates are the work of Shri Benu Sen, Photographer, and his colleagues Sarvashri Kshirod Roy, Subhas Chakravarti and Swapan Kumar Biswas. I am deeply beholden to all of them for their ungrudging co-operation and quick service.

Last, but not the least, are my thanks due to Dr. Amal Sarkar, Publication Officer of the Museum, who has conducted the book through the Press.

Indian Museum,
1st July, 1978.

Arabinda Ghosh



Plan and elevation of the Bharhut Stupa
[after Cunningham. *Stupa of Bharhut* (London, 1879), pl. III]



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CHAPTER I

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE RAILING AND GATEWAY

As the visitor enters the Indian Museum by the Main Gate and then turns to the right, he finds himself in front of the Bharhut Gallery. In this Gallery are housed the massive Gateway and part of the Railing of the Bharhut Stūpa. These remains are in the dark red sandstone of Central India, quarried from the Kaimur Hills. Our first acquaintance with the material is made at the entrance of the Bharhut Room, where at each side of the door there is a railing pillar bearing life-size figures carved in bas-relief. If in order to form an idea of the Early Indian Classical art at its zenith one must go to Sanchi and look at the sculptures on the four Gateways of the Great Stūpa, one must also come to the Indian Museum and gaze at the reliefs of the Bharhut Railing and Gateway to form an idea of the initial stages of that very artistic movement; for Early Indian Classical art passes slowly, but surely, from Bharhut through Bodhgaya to Sanchi.

Bharhut is a small village in the Nagod Tahsil of the Satna district in Madhya Pradesh. It is situated six miles to the north-east of Unchhara and nine miles to the south of the Satna Railway Station of the Central Railway. It can be reached from the small Railway station of Lagargawan between Satna and Unchhara.

Here, in 1873-74, Cunningham discovered the remains of a Buddhist Stūpa, which was made of brick and finished with a coat of plaster on the outside. It was situated on a low eminence at the foot of a hill, called Lāl Pāhār, about half a mile to the north of the village of Bharhut. Although its major part had already been destroyed by the neighbouring villagers¹ quarrying for bricks and stone, Cunningham was able to recover portions of the great stone railing (*vedikā*) and also the Eastern Gateway (*torāṇa*), which he removed to the Indian Museum in 1875², as present from the Raja of Nagod. Some of the stray pieces that still remained at the site were in subsequent years removed to the Residency Garden at Satna from where they were acquired for the Museum and brought down to Calcutta in 1926.

¹Cunningham informs us that the present village of Bharhut, consisting of upwards of 200 houses, is built entirely of the bricks taken from the Stupa, (cf. Cunningham, *Stupa of Bharhut*, London, 1879, pp. 5).

²Lovers of Indian antiquities must note with gratitude that Cunningham was opposed to the Shifting of the remains of the Railing and Gateway of the Bharhut Stūpa to London (cf. Cunningham, *Stupa of Bharhut*, London, 1879, pp. VI-VII).

Cunningham excavated the sole remaining portion of the Stūpa, on the south-east face, which measured 1.83 m. in height by about 3.05 m. in length at bottom. It was entirely covered with a coat of plaster on the outside. This was no doubt a fragment of the cylindrical base or drum (*medhi*) of the Stūpa. The lower half of this member was quite plain, but the upper half was ornamented with a series of triangular-shaped recesses, 0.34 m. broad at top and 0.11 m. at bottom, and 0.22 m. to 0.23 m. apart. These recesses were intended for lamps. The sides of each recess were formed in two steps, so that each would hold five lights in three rows. As there would have been 120 recesses in the whole circumference of 64.89 m., each row of recesses would have held 600 lamps in three lines of illumination.

Although only a fragment of about three meters in length now remains of the Stūpa itself, we know from the pavement that its shape was circular. From his investigations Cunningham was able to ascertain the following dimensions of the Stūpa and its Railing (Fig. 1).

- (1) The diameter of the Stūpa at its base, that is, at the base of its drum (*medhi*) was 20.65 m.
- (2) The interior diameter of the stone Railing was 26.95 m.
- (3) The width of the *pradakshinapatha* around the Stūpa (between the base of the Stūpa and the Railing) was 3.15 m.
- (4) The bricks of which the original Stūpa was made were square in shape, measuring 30.5 cm. \times 30.5 cm. \times 9 cm.

In the absence of the superstructure (*i.e.*, the dome, *harmikā* etc.) one has to visualize the form of the Stūpa from representations of the same on the Railing (Pl. XVIII, d) and the Gateway (Pl. I), all of which present the same common features. They show a hemispherical dome (*aṇḍa*) raised on a cylindrical base or drum (*medhi*). The lower portion of the drum is decorated with a series of mouldings and decorative designs, and on its top stands the railing which surrounds the base of the dome. The body of the dome is decorated all over with floral motifs and scroll-work. On the top of the dome (*aṇḍa*) there is a square platform surrounded by a railing containing the *harmikā*, which from representations, appears to be a sort of structure with a barrel-vaulted roof, crowned by a corbelled member from which rises the shaft (*yashṭhi*) bearing umbrellas (*chhatravali*).

THE RAILING

The Stūpa was surrounded by a great Railing (*vedikā*), composed of a series of stone posts or pillars (*thabho*=*stambha*), rectangular in section, joined together by three parallel sets of lenticular cross-bars (*sūchi*) mortised into the pillars on either side, and capped by a huge coping (*ushṇisha*), rounded at the top (Frontispiece). From

Cunningham's descriptions it appears that this Railing stood on a terraced flooring at a distance of 3.15 m. from the base of the cylindrical drum (*medhi*) of the Stūpa ; and as such it possibly formed the lower or ground balustrade of the Stūpa. It had four openings for entrance, each about 2.60 m. wide, on the four cardinal points. The Railing was thus divided into four quadrants, each of which consisted of sixteen pillars. Of these sixteen pillars two were terminus-pillars of the quadrant and the others, intermediate pillars. Each opening stood between one of the terminus-pillars of two adjacent quadrants. From the right-hand terminus-pillar, viewed from the outer side, of each quadrant the Railing was extended outwards at right angles for two pillar-spaces so as to form an L-shaped fence (also called a Return railing) to cover direct approach to the Stūpa, so that a visitor desiring to enter the *pradakshinapatha* by the East Gate had really to approach from the north, one entering by the South Gate had to walk from the east, one entering by the West Gate had to come from the south, and one entering by the North Gate had to proceed from the west. The right-hand terminus-pillar of each quadrant thus becomes a corner-pillar (Cunningham's pillar of inner corner) from which the Return railing (L-shaped fence) originated. The Return consisted of four more pillars of which one formed a corner-pillar (Cunningham's pillar of outer corner) and another a terminus-pillar of the Return, the remaining two being intermediate pillars. The Railing thus consisted of twenty pillars in each quadrant or eighty pillars in the whole circle, including the Returns at each entrance.

The pillars of the Railing are monoliths. They are 2.16 m. in height, with a section of 0.53 to 0.56 m. face for sculpture, by 0.30 to 0.33 m. side for mortices of the cross-bars. The corner-pillars (both inner-corner of the quadrant and outer-corner of the Return) at the entrances are 0.56 m. square in section. The edges of all the pillars, except the corner ones, are slightly bevelled on both faces ; and they are ornamented by a round boss or full medallion in the middle, and by half medallions at the top and the bottom. All these medallions as well as the bevelled edges of the pillars are filled with elaborate sculpture. Altogether thirtyfive pillars, more or less perfect, were found on the site of the Stūpa, along with numerous fragments of others. Fourteen others have been discovered at the neighbouring villages of Pathora and Batanmara, making a total of fortynine, considerably more than half of the original number of eighty.

The left terminus-pillar of each quadrant viewed from the outside, can be distinguished from the others by the fact that it has mortices for three cross-bars of the quadrant only on its inner (*i.e.*, right-hand) side, and spaces for sculpture on its outer side and inner and outer faces. Each of these three spaces is filled with a life-size figure of Yaksha, Yakshini, Nāga or Devatā.

The right terminus-pillar of a quadrant, that is the pillar at right angle formed by the quadrant and corresponding Return, has mortices on its inner (*i.e.*, left-hand)

side and outer face for cross-bars of the quadrant and Return respectively. It has spaces for sculpture on its outer side and inner face.

The remaining pillars of a quadrant may be termed as intermediate pillars. They have mortices for the quadrant cross-bars on their two sides, and spaces for sculpture on their inner and outer faces. Some of these intermediate pillars bear life-size figures of Yakshas, Yakshinis, etc. on their either face. The edges of all these intermediate pillars, except those bearing life-size figures, are slightly bevelled on both faces; and they are ornamented by a round boss or full medallion in the middle, and by half medallions at the top and the bottom. All these medallions as well as the bevelled edges of the pillars are filled with elaborate sculpture.

The terminus-pillar of a Return, like the left terminus-pillar of a quadrant, has mortices for the Return cross-bars on its inner side, and spaces for sculpture on its outer side and inner and outer faces. Each of these spaces is generally divided by sculptured railing into three square panels, each of which is filled with a scene from the *Jātakas*, or from the Buddha's life.

The outer corner-pillar of a Return, that is, the pillar at right-angle formed by two sides of the Return, has mortices for the Return cross-bars on its inner face and inner side, and spaces for sculpture on its outer face and outer side. Each of these spaces, as in the case of a Return terminus-pillar, is divided by sculptured railings into three square panels similarly filled with *Jātaka*-scenes or scenes from the Buddha's life. This Return pillar corresponds in some respect to the right terminus-pillar of a quadrant.

The remaining two pillars of a Return are intermediate pillars like those of a quadrant and are similarly ornamented.

The stone cross-bars or rails (*sūchi*) are lenticular in section. They are appropriately called *sūchi* or 'needle' in the inscriptions as they performed the duty of needling together the pillars by being fitted into their mortices or eyelet holes. The cross-bars of the quadrants measure 0.60 to 0.62 m. in length by 0.57 m. in breadth with a thickness of 0.16 m. Compared with the cross-bars of the ground balustrade of Sanchi Stūpa I, the Bharhut ones have lesser thickness which make their curved surfaces very much flatter. These cross-bars have circular bosses or medallions on each face which are sculptured with subjects similar to those of the pillars medallions.

The cross-bars of the L-shaped Return, owing to the wider intercolumnation of their pillars, are much larger than those of the quadrant railing, measuring 0.75 and 1.02 m. long by 0.57 m. high with a thickness of 0.16 m. Most of these cross-bars, like those of the quadrant Railing, are embossed with a round medallion on each face containing floral designs and other decorative motifs. Only on two of these longer

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rail-bars there are oblong panels on each face instead of round medallions. These panels contain representations of scenes from the *Jātakas* and life scenes of the Buddha.

There were 228 cross-bars in the complete Railing including the Returns. Of these about eighty have been recovered, six being found at Unchhera. As they weigh about 75 kilograms each, their removal was very easy.

The coping or continuous architrave (*ushvishā*), which crowned the circle of pillars, is formed of massive blocks of stone, rounded at the top, each spanning two intercolumniations. The blocks are upwards of 2.14 m. in length, with a height of 0.57 m., and a thickness of 0.51 m. They are secured firmly to each other by long tenons fitting into corresponding mortices, and to the tops of the pillars by a stout tenon on each, which fits a socket on the underside of the coping stone. Each block is slightly curved to suit the circumference of the circle. This curvature added considerably to the stability of the Railing; for as each set of three tenons formed a triangle, each coping stone became an efficient tie to keep the three pillars on which it was set in their places. The total length of the coping, including the Returns at the four entrances was 100.65 m. The whole of this coping was most elaborately carved, both on the inside and on the outside. Cunningham found only one coping stone *in situ*, resting on three pillars of the south-east quadrant abutting on the Eastern Gateway. But no less than fifteen others have been found in the excavations, out of an original total of forty.

Between the Railing and the Stūpa there was a clear space, 3.15 m. wide, for the perambulation (*pradakshinā*) of the pilgrims round the sacred monument. The whole of this space was covered with a thick flooring of lime plaster, which had lasted well to the days of the excavations by Cunningham. The outer edge of the flooring was finished by a line of curved kerb stones, cut exactly to the circumference of the inner circle of the Railing. The pillars of the Railing were set against the kerb stones which just touched the diameter of the lower half medallions. The foot of each pillar, which was quite rough, rested on a square block laid directly on the earth.

Cunningham's excavations also brought to light the remains of a second railing of much smaller dimensions. Only two pillars, each having a height of 0.64 m. and a breadth of 0.17 m. and containing standing figures; four pieces of curved kerb stones in which the pillars were set and ten pieces of curved coping of this railing were found. As the ten pieces of coping have been dug out from positions outside the line of the great Railing, Cunningham presumed that this railing must have formed an outer enclosure erected at a later date. However, the style of execution of the figures on the two pillars does not suggest a much later date for them as postulated by Cunningham. Both N. G. Majumdar³ and D. Mitra⁴, therefore, suggest that the pieces formed

³Majumdar, N. G., *Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum, Part I* (1937), p. 2.

⁴Mitra, Debala, *Buddhist Monuments* (1971), p. 93.

part of a balustrade encircling an upper processional path (*i.e.*, Berm balustrade) around the spring of the dome, as at the great Stūpa I at Sanchi, to which access was got by a stone staircase of which a fragment, 0.94 m. wide and having seven steps of 25.5 cm. each, was found loose in the excavations.

EASTERN GATEWAY

At each entrance, almost on a line with the terminus-pillars of the quadrants and covered by the L-shaped fences (Returns), there arose high above the Railing a magnificent Gateway (*torāṇa*). Only the Eastern Gateway (Pl. I) has survived the ravages of time and come down to us to be re-erected in the Bharhut Gallery. It has a total height of 6.86 m. and is composed of two curiously shaped pillars and an ornamental arch, the former supporting the latter. The bases of the pillars are 42 cm. square in section upto a height of 46 cm. (*chaturasra padasthāna*); above this the shafts are chiselled to form a group of four octagons (*ashtāsra stambha*) joined together to represent a cluster of four columns. Each of these four octagons is crowned by a distinct lotiform (*padmabandha*) bell-capital surmounted by a smaller cylindrical plinth or rather circular abacus adorned all over with lotus-petal designs. These four bell-capitals with their abaci are covered by a single square abacus on which rests a large massive member showing four animals, two on each face seated back to back, and two floral motifs, consisting of half lotuses surmounted by the so-called 'honey-suckle' on the sides. On the outer (*i.e.*, the eastern) face of the northern pillar these animals are two lions with leonine faces (the face of one lion is broken away); on the inner (*i.e.*, the western) face of the same pillar, two lions with human faces. The southern pillar has, on the outer (eastern) face, two bulls (face of both broken away); and on the inner (western) face, two lions, one of them having the face of a bird, the face of the other being mutilated.

The pillars of the Gateway, as measured by Cunningham, are 42 cm. thick, and 2.93 m. high; the four-grouped capitals with their abaci are each 34 cm. high, while the height of the surmounting figures is 57 cm. Thus the total height of each pillar is 3.85 m. It is on the four consecutive faces of two octagons of the southern pillar that the famous dedicatory inscription of King Dhanabhūti is inscribed.

The animal capitals support the superstructure of arches or the *torāṇa* proper. This consists of three massive architraves, placed one above the other by means of square blocks of stone and a large number of small balusters and statue-pillars. The architraves are curviform with volute ends, that is, their middle portion, between the two supporting pillars, is slightly curved, and their projecting ends are shaped into spirals to resemble the volutes of an Ionian capital. The lowermost architrave is placed direct on the quadruple animal capitals of the two supporting pillars. The middle and topmost architraves are separated from the one immediately below it by means of square

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blocks or *dados* placed between them in line with the supporting pillars below. The empty spaces between the central curved parts of the architraves are filled with eleven small balusters and statue-pillars placed alternately. Of the topmost architrave nothing but the volute ends could be discovered. Its middle portion has, therefore, been reconstructed in cement plaster without any ornament. The superstructure of the *torāṇa* was surmounted by a huge pinnacle consisting of a nine-petalled 'honey-suckle' arising out of a half-lotus. It has been found in fragments from which its shape has been reconstructed with certainty.

One of the pillars of the Gateway (the southern one), along with its crowning capital, was found still standing *in situ* on the south side of the east entrance; and the excavations brought to light the other one, in four fragments, the lowermost fragment still in its original position. Members of the superstructure of the Gateway, *viz.*, the two remaining architraves, *dados*, balusters, pinnacle, etc., were found in fragments in the excavations and from the neighbouring villages. Of these, the central curved portion of the middle architrave was found built into the wall of the castle of Batanmara, from where it has been recovered by Cunningham through the courtesy of the then Thakur of Batanmara.

It has become a commonplace belief among students of early Indian architecture that the conception and execution of the Railing and Gateway suggest their being copied from wooden prototypes, as the technique followed in their erection is that of the joiner instead of that of the mason. There could have been no doubt that the railings and gateways around *stūpas* were originally all made of wood; and it also appears correct, as has been suggested by Irwin⁵, that the only reason for the change over from wood to stone was lastingness. But religious and ritual conventions demanded that only the *vedikā* type of railing and the *torāṇa* type of gateway should surround a *stūpa*. In a *vedikā* type of railing, where rail-bars have to be fitted on to the posts keeping void spaces between them, mortising the bars into the posts is always the easiest and most efficient process of construction. This would apply irrespective of whether the building material be wooden beams or blocks of stone, as this way of construction, whatever be the material, imparts durability to the structure. Even in ashlar masonry clamping the slabs of stone with one another make them more secure in their places than if they were set in cement mortar. The type of structure that they are, the *vedikās* are best constructed by the joiner's method, even when those of the mason are well in vogue; and the construction of the Bharhut Stūpa itself shows that the mason's art was well in advance in that period. The *vedikā* type of railing around many of the Government buildings at New Delhi which are constructed by

⁵Irwin, John, "Asokan Pillars: a re-assessment of the evidence—III: Capitals," in the *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 117, Oct., 1975, p. 639.

the mortice-and-tenon technique in this age of reinforced concrete masonry will prove the veracity of our remark.

The Railing and the Gateway were profusely decorated with sculptures in bas-relief. These bas-reliefs not only beautified the monument, but also served a higher and transcendental purpose by inspiring a deep religious feeling, through illustrations of scenes from popular mythology and Buddhist legend and history, in the minds of the pilgrims who circumambulated the Stūpa. On the Railing hardly any space is left vacant ; but in contrast with this the shafts of the Gateway pillars are left severely plain, although the portion starting from the capital upwards is again richly embellished with reliefs.

It may be mentioned here that in the matter of ornamentation, the Bharhut Railing and Gateway present great contrast with those of the Sanchi Stūpa I, which is a contemporary monument and almost similar to the Bharhut one in plan and design. The great Railing (*i.e.*, the ground balustrade) of Sanchi Stūpa I is severely plain ; in contrast its four gateways including the pillars (which are square in section in contradistinction with the curiously formed Bharhut Gateway pillars) and architraves are very profusely sculptured both inside and out.

Sculptures on the Torana

The projecting ends of the architraves of the Eastern Gateway, unlike those of the Sanchi Stūpa I which are straight, are sloped to form spirals wherein are shown open-mouthed crocodiles (Pl. I). Their curled tails fit finely into the spirals of the volute ends, the gaping mouths remaining facing the pillars. The square parts of each beam, between the volute ends and the curved centre, are decorated with a temple or mansion (Pl. I) on one side and a *stūpa* (Pl. I) on the other. According to Barua, the mansion, which has a high arched doorway and contains a cubical jewel-seat (*Bodhimanda*) canopied by an umbrella, is a symbolical representation of the Bodhisattva's Descent from the Tushita Heaven, while the *stūpa* on the other side symbolically represents the Master's Decease (*Mahāparinirvāṇa*).

The curved central portion (between the two supporting pillars) of the lowermost architrave shows the same sculptural representation on its two faces (Pl. I). In the centre we see a *Bodhimanda* (a rectangular altar on a low plinth) under a tree, which according to Cunningham, is the banyan or *vaṭa* but according to Barua, the *asvattha*, the Bodhi Tree of Buddha Śākyamuni. On either side of the *Bodhimanda* there is a human worshipper paying homage to the *Bodhimanda* with joined hands held against the chest in an attitude of respect. The worshipper on the right (inner face) wears a long thick coat (*udichyavesa*) over his body and a scarf over the coat. The other worshipper on the left wears the scarf over his bare body. Barua thinks that the worshipper on the right is intended to represent King Dhanabhūti, the donor of the

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Toraṇa and that on the left, one of his attendants. Behind the human worshippers is shown a procession of wild elephants bringing flower-offerings to the Bodhi Tree. In the right half of the inner face two bigger elephants are carrying each a bunch of lotus-buds, keeping in front a small young elephant that gently walks on towards the *Bodhimaṇḍa* under the tree. The left half also shows three elephants; the young elephant on this side is partially mutilated, and the two larger ones carry lotus buds and flowers in their uplifted trunks. A similar scene of worship of the Bodhi Tree and the Throne is depicted on the outer face, where instead of six we see four elephants, the younger elephants being dispensed with, and the position of the two human worshippers is reversed.

Barua thinks that the scene symbolically represents the Enlightenment (*sambodhi*) of the Buddha at Bodhgaya on which occasion the animals have come to pay homage to him. The artist thinks that like men the animals too must show their reverence to the Master! In the depiction of the scene the artist has cunningly taken the opportunity to introduce the figure of Dhanabhūti, the donor of the *Toraṇa*, as one of the worshippers.

The curved centre of the middle architrave presents only one sculptured face⁶, which shows a procession of four leonine animals, two on each side, bringing lotus flowers towards the *Bodhimaṇḍa* under a tree (Pl. I). The tree appears to be a creeping plant of bushy growth and may represent a clump of bamboos, as suggested by Cunningham. The *Bodhimaṇḍa*, no doubt, represents the Buddha himself, and the clump of bamboos perhaps indicates his august presence at the Veṇuvana (Bamboo Grove) at Rājagṛha, where the Buddha resided for some time. The animal on the extreme right has a human head and that on the extreme left a bird's head; but the two in the middle are true lions with huge open mouths.

The *dados* or square blocks of stone, placed between the architrave in line with the supporting pillars below, have been found in many fragments⁷. As reconstructed by Cunningham, they used to show on each face three Persepolitan pillars standing on a railing, with large lotus flowers in the spaces between the pillars.

⁶It is apparent that while being used as a building material, the stone beam had been split longitudinally into two parts through the middle which accounts for the loss of its other sculptured face.

⁷As reconstructed in the Indian Museum the *dados* have been shown plain, as the fragments recovered in the excavations were too small to serve any architectural function. They have, therefore, been reconstructed plain in cement plaster.

In the long space between the central curved parts of the architraves were inserted eleven small balusters and statue-pillars placed alternately*. The statue-pillars are square in cross-section, while the balusters are invariably octagons with pedestals and capitals resembling those of the Persepolitan pillars. The square abacus of each baluster supports the figure of two ordinary deer, sitting side by side and back to back. Among the surviving statue-pillars we come across two standing male and two standing female figures.

These little balusters and pillar-statues are of considerable importance, as they often bear on their bases and capitals single *Kharoshthi* letters as masons' marks. From the occurrence of these *Kharoshthi* letters it has been inferred that the Gateway was made by artists hailing from the north-west, that is, from the Gandhāra region. It, however, appears from a consideration of the pillar-statues that the artists who made the Gateway belonged to the Mathura atelier.

Crowning the Gateway is a huge pinnacle consisting of a nine-petalled 'honey-suckle' arising out of a half-lotus and surmounted by a *dharmachakra* or Wheel of Law (Pl. I). This has been restored with certainty from fragments found in the excavations.

Symbolism of the Torāṇa

Considered in relation to the architraves with their sculptures and the supporting pillars, the *Torāṇa* symbolically represents a parapeted bridge over the river of Life with hungry crocodiles lying in ambush on either bank. This bridge is the *dharmasetu* (the Law) made by the Buddha for the salvation of mankind. It rests high on two pillars formed of the Four Noble Truths (*chattāri-Āriya-sachchāni*) and the Eight-fold Way (*aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*). The two gateway pillars are, therefore, made to represent a cluster of four posts, symbolising the Four Noble Truths (*chattāri-Āriya-sachchāni*), each of which is an octagon (*aṭṭhaṅgika*). The Buddha's Descent (*ukramaṇa*), represented by the mansion, and his Decease (*parinirvāṇa*), represented by the *stūpa*, on either side of the architraves are the beginning and the end of this progressive pathway. This pathway gradually rises to a climax represented by the Buddha's Enlightenment (*Sambodhi*, in the lowermost architrave) and Preaching of the Law (at the *Veṇuvana*, middle architrave), which mark the stages of the greatest triumphs attained by the

*In the reconstruction of the Eastern Gateway in the Indian Museum it has only been possible to fill in the space between the middle and lowermost architraves with balusters and statue-pillars; and these, viz., seven balusters and four statue-pillars, could not be fitted alternately, as they should be, but have been inserted as they fitted the corresponding mortices. The space between the middle and uppermost architraves has been left vacant owing to the non-availability of requisite number of balusters and statue-pillars.

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Master in his endeavour to lift himself and mankind above the normal level of religiosity (*dharmatā*). This pathway, posts and parapets of the *dharmasetu*, represented in the Torāṇa by the architraves, supporting pillars and balusters respectively, serve to prevent those who walk by it from falling into the abyss of damnation to be devoured by the crocodile, (*Māra*) who in reality, represents *Māra* the embodiment of mundane passions and delusion. This crocodile, the embodiment of Evil (*Māra*), according to Buddhist tradition, pursued the Buddha from his Birth to his Decease, waging the eternal struggle between the good and the evil, for which the *dharmasetu* had been erected so that mankind may subvert his machinations².

REMAINS OF THE RAILING IN THE INDIAN MUSEUM

Besides the Gateway (*Torāṇa*), of which an account has been given above, the Museum possesses 29 pillars, more or less in tact, fragment of 21 more pillars, 66 cross-bars and 32 pieces of coping of the ground balustrade of the Stūpa. Of these, sixteen pillars, fitted with cross-bars and coping, have been erected, six on either side of the Torāṇa and four in front, to give the visitor an idea of part of the Railing and the L-shaped Return as it originally stood at Bharhut (Frontispiece). The six pillars to the north and the same number to the south of the Torāṇa describe about a half respectively of the north-east and the south-east Quadrant of the Railing. Of these, the one abutting on the north pillar of the Torāṇa is the left-hand terminus-pillar of the north-east Quadrant having mortices only on its inner side for the Quadrant cross-bars and spaces for sculpture on its three remaining faces and side. All these spaces are filled with life-size figures of Yakshas and Yakshinis, that on the inner face being a figure of Kubera, the guardian of the North. Similarly, the Quadrant pillar abutting on the south pillar of the Torāṇa is the right-hand terminus-pillar of the south-east Quadrant from which the L-shaped Return issues out. It has mortices on its inner side for the cross-bars of the Quadrant and also on its outer face for those of the Return and spaces for sculpture on its outer side and inner face. In the dedicatory inscription this pillar has been described as the first pillar (*paṭhama thabho*), the gift of Chāpadevī, wife of Revatimitra of Vidiśā. The remaining pillars of the two Quadrants are intermediate pillars, having mortices for the Quadrant cross-bars on their two sides and spaces for sculpture on their two faces.

The four pillars in front of the Torāṇa describe the two arms of the L-shaped fence or Return. Its corner-pillar (Cunningham's pillar of outer corner) has mortices for cross-bars of the two arms of the L on its inner side and inner face and spaces for sculpture on its outer face and outer side. Each of these spaces is divided by representations of railings into three square panels showing scenes from Buddhist legend and

²For an exposition of the Bharhut Torāṇa, see Barua, B. M., *Bharhut*, Book I (1934), p. 10.

history. From the fact that one of the panels (the lowermost one) on its outer side contains a representation of King Ajātaśatru's visit to the Buddha, this pillar has been designated as the Ajātaśatru Pillar.

The terminus-pillar of the Return as erected in the Bharhut Gallery in front of the Torāṇa has mortices for the Return cross-bars on its inner side only and spaces for sculpture on its two faces and on the outer side. In this pillar the three spaces bear life-size figures of Yakshas and Nāgas, the one on the outer side being that of Virudhaka Yaksha, the guardian of the South.

The two remaining pillars of the Return are intermediate pillars like those of the quadrants. The cross-bars of the Return are somewhat longer than those of the quadrants, those of the sothern arm being 0.75 m. and those of the eastern arm 1.04 m. long.

It should be mentioned here that none of these pillars and other members of the Railing and the Return, except the ones mentioned below, were found in positions allotted to them in their present set up in the Museum. Only the right-hand terminus-pillar of the South-East Quadrant (Chāpadevi's First Pillar) and the two intermediate pillars immediately to the south of this First pillar, along with their corresponding cross-bars and covered with a coping, were found standing *in situ* when Cunningham began his excavations. In the reconstruction in the Museum, these have been erected as they should be by the south pillar of the Torāṇa to form the intital part of the South-East Quadrant. The other pillars, members and fragments have been dug out from various places and depths of the excavations or otherwise recovered from the neighbouring villages. The more or less well preserved members among these have been used in the reconstruction of the Railing and Return complete with cross-bars and coping.

Ten other pillars, fitted with cross-bars, but not covered with coping, have been erected in three groups in various places of the Gallery to form fragments of Railing and Return. Some other pillars have been exhibited singly, two of them, both corner ones, being placed on either side of the entrance to the Gallery. Some fragments bearing interesting sculptures have been exhibited on the western wall.

From their architectural peculiarities as well as from the sculptures and inscriptions engraved on them, and also from the location from which they have been dug out by Cunningham, the position of some of the pillars in the original Railing as it stood at Bharhut may be determined. Thus, on the left-hand terminus-pillar of the North-East Quadrant, abutting on the north pillar of the Eastern Gateway as erected in the Museum, we find on the inner face the figure of Kubera, the guardian of the North. As this pillar has spaces for sculpture on its inner and outer faces and also on the outer side and mortices for cross-bars only on its inner side, it can be nothing but

a left-hand terminus-pillar of a Quadrant. But its present position in the Museum near the Eastern entrance would make Kubera the guardian of the East. This anomaly can only be removed if this pillar is made to form the left-hand terminus-pillar of the North-West Quadrant abutting on the Northern Gateway.

Another pillar which, as erected in the Museum, forms the terminus-pillar of the Return Railing in front of the Eastern Gateway, bears on its outer face the figure of Virudhaka Yaksha, the guardian of the South. The position of the Yaksha in the Return Railing does not appear to be appropriate. Because, the corner-and terminus-pillars of Return railings at Bharhut were generally divided into panels containing scenes from the Buddha's life, whereas the pillar under discussion bears life-size figures of Yakshas and Nāga on its two faces and on the outer side and mortices for cross-bars on its inner side. These are peculiarities of the left-hand terminus-pillar of a Quadrant Railing; and so this pillar can only be the left-hand terminus-pillar of the South-East Quadrant abutting the Southern Gateway, which will place Virudhaka, the guardian of the South in his proper place.

From his observations during the excavations, Cunningham concluded that the Ajātaśatru Pillar, forming the corner-pillar of the Return Railing in front of the Eastern Gateway at the Museum, was originally the Western Gate Return corner-pillar at Bharhut. Similarly, the Prasenañjit and Brahmadeva Pillars, erected in the Museum as the terminus and corner-pillars of the same fragmentary return railing on the north-eastern side of the Bharhut Room, were originally the South Gate Return terminus and North Gate Return corner-pillars respectively at Bharhut.

Ornamentation of the Railing

As regards the ornamentation of the Railing, certain general features may be noticed at the outset.

(a) Coping—It has already been mentioned that the whole of the Coping is most elaborately and minutely carved, both on the inside and the outside. At the end of the coping over the L-shaped fence, just above the terminus-pillar of the Return, there is seen a boldly carved lion sitting on its haunches. This has been found only in fragments. Next to the lion, on both the inner and outer faces of the Return coping, there is a kneeling elephant (Pl. IV, b). The coping stone being fragmentary, the kneeling elephant on the outer face is missing. From the elephant's mouth issues a long undulating creeper (*latākarma*) which continues to the junction of the Return Coping with that over the South-Eastern Quadrant of the Circular Railing. Then on either face of the Coping over the Quadrant Railing there again occurs a kneeling elephant issuing from his mouth the same undulating creeper (Pl. IV, a) which continues to the end of the Quadrant. There are thus two separate beginning for the creeper-design (*latākarma*), one in the Quadrant Coping and one in the Return. How this creeper-design

was finished in the left end of each Quadrant Coping is not known to us. It may be, as Barua thought, that on the left side the creeper is represented as issuing forth from (or rather entering or being thrust into) the mouth of a similarly kneeling elephant. But the coping stone spanning the terminus and the two adjacent pillars of the North-East Quadrant as erected in the Museum, appears from its peculiarities to be itself a terminus coping piece; and in it the kneeling elephant is missing from either face; on its inner face the creeper, producing forth a bunch of garlands from its leaf, is shown almost touching the border; on the outer face the border is mutilated, but here also the creeper appears to have touched the border of the coping and the kneeling elephant is missing. It should also be noted that the kneeling elephant on either face of the South-Eastern Quadrant Coping is a wild animal (Pl. IV, a), while the remaining one on the inner face of the Return Coping is represented as a tame one, fully caparisoned and more prostrate (Pl. IV, b) than those on the Quadrant Coping. If the Quadrant and the Return had originally made a single whole, the creeper-design on the coping over both would have been continuous, that is, the kneeling elephant on the outer face of the Quadrant Coping would have been dispensed with, and the figures of the animals would have been carved alike on the Return and Quadrant (inner face) Copings. This fact possibly proves that the Returns were added at a later date.

This undulating creeper (*lata karma*) in reality represents the *kalpalatā* or *kalpavallī*. The *kalpavallī* is the Wish-Fulfilling creeper of heavenly origin. It fulfils all human desires by producing from its tendrils all that mortal men and women want for their happiness and well being, viz., costly apparel and ornaments, drinks and eatables, etc. On the Bharhut Coping the *kalpavallī* has been represented as a lotus rhizome issuing out of an elephant's mouth. As we shall see later on both the lotus and the elephant symbolically represent the waters, the primordial source of all creation. This indicates that to the artists of Bharhut the *kalpavallī* formed an element of Water Cosmology.

The *kalpavallī* by its meanderings divides the faces of the Coping into a number of semicircular panels, each of which is filled with sculpture (Pl. II). On the outer face all these panels are filled with repetitions of the same elaborate representation of a full-blown lotus flower. On the inner face some of the panels have flowers and fruits, necklaces, ear-rings and other personal ornaments, others are filled with figures of lions, elephants and other animals and strange fabulous creatures having the body of a lion and the head of a man or bird, while the rest are occupied with scenes from the *Jātakas* and other stories (Pl. II). These scenes and animals on the one hand and the bunches of fruits and flowers and ornaments on the other generally alternate with each other, the former (i.e., the story-telling scenes and animals) filling the upper and the latter (i.e., the flowers, fruits and ornaments) the under panels. In exceptional cases they overlap. In most cases the scene in one panel represents a

complete Birth-story (*Jātaka*) ; and in a few, one story is distributed into two or more successive upper panel. In one exceptional case four successive upper and lower panels of the Return Coping are shown to contain scenes which, according to Barua, depict a Buddhist version of the sinners' sufferings in hell. This arrangement was evidently due to want of space. It should also be noted that all the fabulous animals occur only on the Quadrant Coping. The bunches of flowers, fruits and ornaments show similarity but no identity of form and design. Among the fruits are to be seen the mango (*āmra sahakāra*) (Pl. VII, a), custard apple (Bengali *ātā*, Hindi *sarifā*) (Pl. VII, d), jack-fruit (*panasa*) (Pl. VII, c), and another fruit resembling the date palm. V. S. Agrawala thinks that the jack-fruit and the mango in reality represent containers, the former technically known as *panasa*, both being shaped after the fruits they resemble, the former for storing wine and the latter for the lac-dye (*lakshā-rāga*) to paint the feet of young ladies. These two fruits "have been specially selected, because the strong odour of ripe jack-fruit resembles that of wine and the juice of the mango fruit is like *lakshā-rāga*."¹⁰

The ornaments include ear-rings of *triratna*-design (Pl. VI, c), ear-pendants of *prākāra-vapra-kunḍala* type (Pl. VI, d), collars (Pl. VI, d), necklaces (*hāra*, Pl. VII, a), girdles (*mekhalā*), wristlets (*valaya*, Pl. VI, c), armlets (*keyūra*), finger-rings (*ahiguriya*, Pl. VI, d), spiral anklets (*pāda-valaya*) etc. The clothes and apparel are represented by scarves and *sāris* ornamented with embroidered floral designs. Besides these, the *triratna*-symbol, the *Bodhimaṇḍa* and the Bodhi-Tree *Asvattha* are present in some of the panels.

This broad line of bas-reliefs is finished on both faces by two elegant borders. The upper border consists of a continuous line of battlements (*prākāra-vapra*) or stepped 'merlons' resembling the Babylonian *ziggurats*, alternating with 'blue lotuses' (*utpalas*) in vertical position which are also treated in the West Asiatic (Egyptian) style. The lower border consists of a row of bells hanging from the ends of a continuous net supported by poles (?). On the outer face the meshes of the net are interwoven of ordinary linen thread, while on the inner face they appear to be jewelled. The net on the inner face seems to truly represent what is called the *ratna-kinkini-jāla*.

(b) Pillars—Below the Coping are the stone posts or pillars (*thabho*=Skt. *stambha*) of the Railing. Most of the intermediate pillars, as has already been said, are divided into three sections by a round boss or full medallion at the middle and half medallions at the top and the bottom. All these medallions are filled with elaborate sculpture, chiefly lotus flowers and other floral compositions. But there are also several showing animals ; and a considerable number shows scenes taken from Buddhist legend (i.e., the *Jātaka* stories) and history (i.e., episodes of the last mundane

¹⁰Agrawala, V. S., *Indian Art* (Varanasi, 1965), p. 142.

existence of Buddha Śākyamuni). A few of the pillars bear single life-size figures of Yakshas, Yakshinis, Devatās and Nāgarājas, etc. The bevelled edges of the medallion-bearing pillars are also decorated, chiefly with flowers and fruits, with human figures, male and female, standing on the flowers with their hands either in an attitude of devotion or reaching upwards to the fruits and flowers (Pls. II, XXIII & XXIV). On some pillars these flowers bear elephants (Pls. III, a & VIII, c), winged horses monkeys or peacocks (Pl. XXII, b), while parrots (Pl. XXII, c) and squirrels (Pl. XXII, d) hang from the branches and nibble at the fruits.

The ornamentation of the terminal and corner-pillars of the Quadrants and Return is different from that of the other pillars. The pillars of the inner corners generally bear life-size figures of mounted standard-bearers, both male and female, (Pl. III, d), while the left-hand terminal pillars of the Quadrants have Yakshas, Yakshinis, Devatās, and Nāgarājas etc. On the outer corner and also on the terminal pillars of the Returns, the faces and sides are generally divided into a number (generally three) of square panels by horizontal bands of railings depicting *Jataka* stories, and lief-scenes of the Buddha on a rather elaborate scale. Several of these scenes are very interesting, as the inscriptions attached to them enable us to identify the different scenes with certainty.

(c) Cross-bars—The stone cross-bars (*gūchi*) of the Quadrants and most of those of the Return have circular bosses or medallions on each face, which are decorated with various subjects similar to those of the pillar medallions. Amongst them, however, there are very few *Jātakas*, but they present us with several humorous scenes and a great variety of floral ornaments of singular beauty. A few of the cross-bar medallions are decorated with geometrical pattern (Pl. XVI, c & d).

Some of the cross-bars of the Return Railing contain oblong panels on each face depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha. Only one of these cross-bars, fitted in the Return Railing erected in the north-eastern side of the Bharhut Gallery is in the Indian Museum. The other cross-bar, of which the two faces have been split apart, had been lying in a Maṭha at Unchhera¹, from where it had been acquired about 1938² by the Freer Gallery, U.S.A.

Date of the Railing and the Gateway

The evidence for determining the date of the Railing (*vedika*) and Gateway (*torāṇa*) of the Bharhut Stūpa consists of the contents and palaeography of the Brāhmī inscriptions found therein. These will be discussed in detail in our chapter on the inscriptions. Suffice it to say here that according to the dedicatory inscription on one

¹Cunningham, *The Stupa of Bharhut*, (Reprint, Varanasi, 1962), p. 12.

²Coomaraswamy, A.K., "Two Reliefs from Bharhut in the Freer Gallery," *JISOA*, Vol. VI, (1938), p. 145 ff.

of its supporting pillars, the gateway (*torāṇa*) was caused to be erected (*kārita*) by (king) Dhanabhūti "during the reign (or in the dominions) of the Suṅgas" (*Suganaḥ raje*). Founded by the general (*Senāpati*) Pushyamitra who supplanted the Mauryas, the Suṅgas referred to in this inscription formed a dynasty that ruled over portions of northern and central India between 187 and 72 B.C.

There are also a large number of votive inscriptions engraved on the Railing which serve as labels to the reliefs carved on it and record the names of the donors who provided funds for the construction of the different parts. The language of the Gateway and Railing inscriptions is a form of Prākṛit that differs from the Prākṛit of the inscriptions of Aśoka. Palaeographically, the Railing inscriptions fall into two groups. The majority belong to a date prior to that of the Gateway inscriptions, while there are a few that appear to be contemporaneous with them.

The characters of the former group of Railing inscriptions are very similar to those of the Besnagar Garuḍa Pillar inscription of Heliodoros, differing only in having a straight *ra*. Heliodoros, as we learn from his record, was an envoy (*yona-dūta*) of the Indo-Greek king Antialcidas (*Antalikita*) who is generally supposed to rule in the Taxila region during the middle of the second century B. C. On palaeographic and other grounds the Heliodoros inscription is assigned to *circa* 125 B. C., which also appears to be the date of the majority of the Railing inscriptions at Bharhut. The Railing, therefore, appears to have been erected during the third quarter of the second century B. C. (150—125 B. C.).

The letter-forms of the Torāṇa inscription of Dhanabhūti shows some definite development when compared to those of the majority group on the Railing. A period of three to five decades has to be allowed for this development. The Torāṇa, therefore, appears to have been erected about 75 B. C., towards the fag end of the rule of the Suṅgas in central India. To about this period (80—50 B. C.) are also to be assigned the few inscriptions on some of the pillars and cross-bars which owe their existence to repair and replacement of the older members of the Railing.

RELIEFS OF THE BHARHUT RAILING

On thematic considerations the reliefs on the Railing may be divided into two main categories, *viz.*,

- (a) Reliefs illustrating subjects of popular interest and mythology ; and
- (b) Reliefs illustrating Buddhist legend and history.

Group (a) reliefs may again be divided into two sub-groups, *viz.*,

- (i) The so-called 'Decorative reliefs'. These bear no inscribed labels, and according to most scholars consist of a *repertoire* of forms and designs, floral, animal

and geometric, used mainly for the beautification of the Railing. As we shall see in our exposition in the following pages, most of these forms and designs (or motifs) bear a deep symbolical meaning, easily understood by the people at large, forming the iconography of the popular faiths, which may be designated as 'Water Cosmology'. These reliefs exhale an aroma of the common people about them. Suffused with inherent beauty and pregnant with apparent symbology, they required no descriptive labels, but directly appealed to the popular sense of the beautiful and the divine. This accounts for their profuse occurrence on the Railing.

(ii) Life-size figures of popular gods and goddesses. Most of these life-size figures bear labels announcing their names. These labels are, therefore, sure guides to their identification. From these we learn that most of these figures stand for popular deities, like Yakshas, Yakshinis, Nāgas and Devatās, gods and goddesses of fertility and prosperity, in some way or other connected with "Water Cosmology". As these deities owe their existence to popular inspiration ingrained in popular mores and beliefs, they cannot be dispensed with; so, the artists of Bharhut have requisitioned their presence and service as devotees and of the great Master to convince the people of the superiority of the Lord (*bhagavā*) and his Faith (*Dhamma*) over those of the demigods who offered homage to him.

Group (b) reliefs may be divided into three sub-groups; viz.,

(i) Reliefs illustrating the presence of the Former Buddhas by the Bodhi-trees peculiar to them.

(ii) Reliefs illustrating the *Jātakas*, that is, stories of the previous existences or births of the Buddha, before he was born as *Śākyamuni*.

(iii) Reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the historical Buddha in his last mundane existence as *Śākyamuni*.

Most of the reliefs of Group (b) (i) to (iii) bear descriptive labels, which help us in identifying the various scenes and stories. From a study of their illustrations on the Railing we learn that by the middle of the second century B. C., when the Railing was erected, the Buddhist myths and legends have already condensed into a formable shape, though they had not yet got their final shape as codified in the scriptures (*Tripitaka*) and other religious books.

So long the attention of scholars has mainly been devoted to the elucidation and identification of the various Buddhist scenes shown in the Railing, B. M. Barua's monumental work on Bharhut in three volumes¹² appears to be the final word on the subject, and deserves careful reading. Scant attention has been bestowed on the so-

¹²Barua, B. M., *Barhut*, Books I-III, published during 1934 to 1937, by the Indian Research Institute, Calcutta.

called "decorative" reliefs. If the Bharhut Railing in the Indian Museum is truly famous, it is for its "decorative" reliefs and the life-size figures, both of which are popular by affiliation. What at once catches the eye and the imagination of a visitor when he first gazes at the Railing are the array of floral designs and fabulous animals, the beautiful damsels on the chamfered edges of the pillars and life-size Yakshas and Yakshinis, who by their lyrical loveliness at once draw attention, and not so much the scenes of Buddhist legend and history which deserve minute study from close quarters. During his twenty years' service in the Indian Museum the present author has many times been asked by foreign visitors to explain as to why so many lotuses are there on the Railing and the import of the fabulous animals on the Coping. The Indian visitor, who by his upbringing has not yet forgotten all his traditional heritage, automatically understands the import of some, though not of all, of these motifs, like the *Pūrṇakumbha*, Gaja-Lakshmi, etc.

Of all scholars, it is Coomaraswamy¹² who has seriously tried to elucidate the meaning of these "decorative" motifs. His pioneer work on the subject even now remains the 'bible' on "decorative" motifs in Indian art. In the present author's exposition of the "decorative art" of Bharhut, Coomaraswamy has always remained as the 'philosopher and guide'. In many places the present author could do no better than summarize the great pioneer's ideas, and only in a few rare instances he has been able to amplify, supplement and expand upon his ideas. This Part I on the remains of Bharhut which mainly deals with the "decorative art" and popular deities appearing on the Railing has, therefore, been dedicated as a mark of the author's gratitude to the august memory of the great Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy.

¹²Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Parts I and II (Reprinted by Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1971)

CHAPTER II

THE DECORATIVE RELIEFS

A large number of the reliefs, showing a remarkable variety of patterns and designs, are mainly decorative in character. They generally occur on the semicircular panels of the coping and on the full and half medallions of the pillars and cross-bars. It is often found that the same design occurs on both faces of the cross-bar.

It should be noted at the outset that Indian "decorative art" is not a mere *repertoire* of forms and designs used only for the purpose of ornamentation with no or little significance attached to them. On the contrary, the designs of Indian "decorative art" are always explicitly significant and form a definite iconography. On the basis of its chief components the "decorative art" of Bharhut may be divided into three categories, *viz.*, the Plant Style, the Animal Style and the Geometric Style. In most cases, the Plant Style and the Animal Style are associated with each other, and human figures, both male and female, occur along with them. It will be apparent from our exposition in the following pages that the Plant Style and most of the motifs of the Animal Style constitute the iconography of "Water Cosmology."

Every society of the ancient world had its own cosmogonical myths. These myths were, no doubt, influenced to a great extent by the physiographical, ecological and cultural environment in which the societies in question grew and developed. But when the earliest cosmogonical myths of these various societies are taken into consideration and compared with each other, there emerges a pattern which may be designated as "Water Cosmology", that is, a body of ideas and beliefs in the origin of the Universe (cosmos) from the waters.

WATER COSMOLOGY

The earliest references to Indian ideas about "Water Cosmology" are found in the *Rigveda* and other Vedic texts, where they occur side by side and mixed up with other more philosophical cosmogonic concepts, *e.g.*, origin from Purusha¹. In the later Vedic texts, particularly in the Upanishads, all these speculations ultimately culminated in the conception of Brahman (Absolute) as the source of all Creation.

¹ *Rigveda*, X, 90, 1-16 (Purusha-sukta).

The passages in the Vedic literature which form our evidence in this respect are, however, very much involved in meaning and significance; and so, it is difficult to get a clear and coherent picture of the cosmogonic ideas contained in them. For this purpose we have to collate all the Vedic myths of Creation and interpret them in the light of similar ideas held by other peoples of the ancient world. Considerable work in this respect has been done by scholars like Norman Brown², Kuiper³ and Irwin⁴. The present author is greatly indebted to these scholars for his exposition of the process of Creation envisaged in the myths of "Water Cosmology" which may be summed up as follows:—

(1) In the beginning there was only water, conceived as an all-pervading Ocean⁵, which symbolized the element of Chaos⁶. Yet, paradoxically, this Ocean of Chaos was supposed mystically to contain within itself the germ⁷, that is, the potentiality⁸, of the origin of the Universe and all life contained therein. "Water Cos-

²Norman Brown, W., "The Creation Myth of the R̥g-veda", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 62 (1942), pp. 85-98.

³Kuiper, F.B.J., (i) "The Three Strides of Vishnu", *Indological Studies in Honour of W. Norman Brown*, American Oriental Society, (1962), pp. 137-51; (ii) "The Bliss of Asa", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Leiden, Vol. VIII (1964), pp. 96-129; (iii) "Cosmogony and Conception: a Query", *Journal of the History of Religions*, University of Chicago, Vol. 10 (1970), pp. 91-138; (iv) "The Basic Concept of the Vedic Religion", *ibid.*, Vol. 15 (1975), pp. 107-20.

⁴Irwin, J., " 'Aśokan' Pillars: a reassessment of the Evidence—Part IV: Symbolism", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 118, (November, 1976), pp. 734-753.

⁵*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XI, 1.6.1—"Verily, in the beginning this (universe) was water, nothing but a sea of water."

Atharva-veda, XII. 1. 8—"That earth which formerly was water upon the ocean....."

In the *R̥gveda* the same idea is implied in X. 129. 1; and in the passages where the Waters are invoked as the Mothers, e.g., X. 82. 5.

In the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, V. 5. 1, the order of Creation (*genesis*) is stated in the following sequence: "In the beginning this (world) was water; water produced the real (*satyam*, i.e., all that exist); and the real (*satyam*) is Brahman; Brahman produced Prajāpati; from Prajāpati the Devas".

⁶That the primeval state of affairs before Creation began was all-pervading Chaos is found in *R̥gveda*, X. 129. 3.

⁷*R̥gveda*, X. 82. 6—"The waters, they received that germ primeval wherein the gods were gathered all together; rested upon the Unborn's navel,....."; and X. 121. 7—"What time the mighty waters came, containing the universal germ,.....".

⁸*R̥gveda*, X. 129. 1, states that the primeval chaotic condition was neither 'existent' nor 'non-existent', that is, there was at one time such an indistinct state when nothing did actually exist and therefore it was not an 'entity', but as it contained in itself the latent potentiality of existence, it was not also a 'non-entity'. What matters in this description is that the primeval condition of chaos and confusion, though it baffled all comprehension, was supposed by the composer of the hymn to possess the potentiality of creation of the universe.

mology" thus "conceives of the waters as containing certain powers of abundance that direct, or at least symbolize or represent, the operations of the life-force as it wells upward from its sources in the waters⁹.

(2) From the bottom of this chaotic Cosmic Ocean there arose a lump of solid matter, described in most of these myths as a clod of earth¹⁰, which floated restlessly on the surface of this ocean. This clod of earth gradually expanded and became the Primordial Hill, which ultimately developed into this Universe. This is the first stage in the creation of the Universe, when the Primordial Hill was still "unfixed" and floated without foundations in the Primordial Ocean. At this stage, heaven and earth, and all other dualities, like day and night and the male and female principles remained compacted and undifferentiated within this Primordial Hill, and consequently, there was no life.

(3) In the next stage of Creation the Primordial Hill became "fixed" in its foundations in the Primordial Ocean. Simultaneously with this "stabilization" of the Primordial Hill, several other things took place. The most important of these was the separation of the heaven and earth by the agency of the Primordial Hill. While separating the heaven and earth, the Primordial Hill also released the sun from the Cosmic Waters; and the sun not only brought light into this world, but by its diurnal course of rising in the east and setting in the west introduced the element of Time into this Universe. Thus was created the duality of Day and Night in the train of which all other dualities, like the male and female principles, appeared, and the cycle of the life process in this world was set in motion. According to the myths, in this second stage there also arose out of the Primordial Hill the Tree of Life from which originated the gods and men and beasts and all other life.

Rigvedic tradition attributes all these demiurgic actions, viz., the "pegging" of the Primordial Hill to the bottom of the Primordial Ocean, separation of the heaven

⁹Coomaraswamy. A.K., *Yakshas*, Part II (Reprint edn., 1971), p. 15.

¹⁰One of the Rigvedic myths informs us that the clod was raised from the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean by Prajapati, who dived into the waters in the form of a boar. (cf. Kuiper, "Cosmogony and Conception: a Query" *Journ. of History of Religions*, Vol. 10 (1970), p. 102, for a discussion of this myth).

We need not bother if some particular function in the process of Creation as envisaged in "Water Cosmology" sometimes attributed to some particular god in the myths. This simply shows the superimposition of later ideas on the original kernel of the myth.

and earth, and the release of the sun from the Cosmic Waters, to Indra¹¹. This simply shows that to the Vedic myth-makers the Primordial Hill, which was considered to be the World Axis, was identical with the god Indra. This is also proved by the *Skambha*-hymns of the *Atharvaveda*¹² which say that *Skambha* is Indra, and Indra is *Skambha*. Modern scholars are puzzled by the obscurity of these hymns; but, as has been pointed by Irwin¹³, the obscurity "vanishes once one recognizes that in ancient India Indra was worshipped in the form of the Indra-pillar," (*Indra-dhvaja*), which was the same thing as the *Skambha* of the *Atharva-vedic* hymns and stood for the Primordial Hill as the Axis of the World. "The important point is that the Indra-pillar was never a mere symbol of the god; the pillar was an actual *manifestation of the god himself*".¹⁴ It should also be remembered that one of the synonyms for the Indra-dhvaja is *Indra-kila*. As the word *kila* means "nail" or "peg", this designation for the World Axis not only refers to Indra's demiurgic act of "pegging" the Primordial Hill to the bottom of the Ocean, but also to the identification of Indra with the Primordial Hill which got itself "pegged" to the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean, thus establishing the ground for the creation of the Universe.

(4) The Primordial Hill which separated the heaven and earth is variously conceived in the different myths as a mountain (*giri, adri, or parvata*) a tree (*vanaspati*), or a pillar (*skambha, stambha*). As has been pointed out by Irwin¹⁵, "these images are often used interchangeably and stand for the same metaphysical concept of the World Axis or *Axis mundi*". The point where the Axis touched the earth is known as the "Navel of the Earth" (Greek *omphalos*, Hebrew *tabor*, Vedic *bhuvanasya nābhih*, Skt. *prithvinābhi*, etc.). Scholars engaged in Hellenic studies at first explained the *omphalos* as a tomb (the *tholos* graves of the early inhabitants of Greece) which was considered to be the womb of Mother Earth where all mortals return after death. Modern scholars after analysing the Greek myths about the *omphalos* have, however, come to

¹¹ *Ṛigveda*, VII. 23. 3—"Indra, when he had slain resistless foemen (*i.e.*, *Vṛitra*), forced with his might the two world halves (*i.e.*, heaven and earth) as under".

The simultaneity of Indra's pegging the Primordial Hill to the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean and his separation of the heaven and earth is implied in *Ṛigveda*, II. 12.2,—“He who fixed fast and firm the earth that staggered, and set at rest the agitated mountains; who measured out the air's wide middle region and gave the heaven support, He men, is Indra”. The simultaneity of Indra's separation of the heaven and earth and his release of the sun is implied in *Ṛigveda*, VIII. 3.6,—“With might hath Indra spread out heaven and earth, with power hath Indra lighted up the Sun”. and in *Ṛigveda*, III. 32.8—“Many are Indra's nobly wrought achievements,.....he beareth up this earth and heaven, and doer of marvels, he begot the Sun and Morning”.

¹² *Atharva-veda*, X, 7 and 8.

¹³ Irwin, J., “‘Aśokan’ Pillars: a Reassessment of the Evidence—IV: Symbolism”, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 118 (November, 1976), p. 740, fn. 24.

¹⁴ Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 740, fn. 24.

¹⁵ Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 738.

the conclusion that the Navel of the Earth in reality "designated the mythical spot at which heaven and earth were separated" by the Primordial Hill or Axis mundi—"in other words, the spot at which our universe was literally 'born' ".¹⁶

To the ancient peoples who fashioned these myths creation of this world was not an event which happened in the modern historical sense of time and space, once and for all. "It happened in sacred time, which was cyclic. It was therefore a recurring event; and if the Universe was not to slip back from Order to Chaos, the Creation had to be re-enacted whenever the overthrow of established order was threatened or even feared".¹⁷ This is exemplified, amongst others, by the Paurāṇik myth of Anantaśāyī-Vishṇu which tells us how after a period of divine creation the Supreme Deity slept on the coils of the serpent Ananta in the midst of the Cosmic Ocean to be awakened, after an interval, to a renewed paroxysm of Creation when the Universe was threatened to destruction by the depredations of the forces of Evil, represented by the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, thus illustrating the cosmogonic theory of the cyclic creation and re-absorption of the Universe by the Deity.

Again, as the ideas contained in these myths are mystical in nature, the concept of space in our sense of exact geographical location may be dispensed with, and "there could be any number of Navels of the Earth without logical inconsistency."¹⁸

As has been pointed out by Irwin, ancient man's obsession with how the world began was governed not by our own ideas about such matters, but "by his desire to get into right relationship with the sacred world as the source of cosmic order and as the key to the perpetuation of life."¹⁹ To him, therefore, the Navel of the Earth with the World Axis placed on it was the supreme link between the human and the celestial—the channel through which Cosmic Order was imposed on this world of ours. By a metaphysical extension of this logic, any spot where man had been in communion with celestial or supernatural powers may be considered as a Navel of the Earth located at the base of the Axis of the Universe. This applies to any shrine or temple where the devotee comes in contact with the Divine, or to any spot consecrated by the divine revelation (*siddhi*) of a saint. Thus in Buddhist literature the *bodhimanda* or *vajrasana* under the Bodhi Tree where Buddha Śākyamuni received his Enlightenment (*sambodhi*) or any other similar seat of a former Buddha has been described as sited on the Navel of the Earth²⁰, and worshipped as such.

We have already mentioned that in the Vedas "Water Cosmology" is found mixed up with, and in fact, plays a subordinate role to other more philosophic cosmo-

¹⁶Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 378.

¹⁷Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 739.

¹⁸Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 738.

¹⁹Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 739.

²⁰Barua, B. M., *Barhut*, Book II (1934).

gonic concepts. The Vedic people appears to have inherited these ideas in the form of an old popular mythology, a legacy from the olden times, which persisted and had to be dovetailed with the philosophic ideas of the Vedic Aryans. The reason for this appears to be that the original Vedic Aryans being a mainly pastoral people were more concerned with their herds of animals than being fully conversant of the operations of the powers of vegetative growth.

On the other hand, cosmogonic conceptions of origin (*genesis*) in the waters were prevalent amongst many of the bronze age civilizations of the Nile²¹, the Euphrates²², and possibly also of the Indus Valley, to whom water, in the form of perennial rivers, was the prerequisite of vegetative growth and communal welfare and happiness.

From the above discussion it will be apparent that "Water Cosmology" was originally the popular cosmogonic belief of the settled populations of the riverine civilizations, and that the Vedic Aryans inherited this conception through their contact with the original population of the land where they settled.

For a proper understanding of the "Plant Style" of decoration on the Bharhut Railing the main points of "Water Cosmology" may be summed up as follows. From the Primeval Waters arose the Plant which is the Tree of Life, and from the Plant all other things, gods, men and beasts. Water, as *rasa*, exists everywhere, as sap in the trees, as clouds in the heavens, as rivers and oceans in this terrestrial earth, as semen in men and animals, and as saliva in the mouth, each of which can serve as a source of the Tree of Life. This Tree of Life, or World Tree, as it is sometimes called, is an undying *Aśvattha* (Pipal, *ficus religiosa*) or *Nyagrodha* (Banyan, *ficus Indica*) according to the various myths preserved in the literature. But in the Plant Style of decoration at Bharhut (and later in the Paurāṇik myth of the Birth of *Brahmā*) it is always the lotus plant. In the art of Bharhut the Tree of Life, represented by the lotus plant, symbolizing the actual act of creation, is shown to come out either of the mouth or navel of a Primal Male, or from a Full Vase, or from the Makara's mouth—all of which represent the waters.

PLANT STYLE

In the Plant Style of decoration at Bharhut the lotus flower plays the most predominant part. To the Indians the lotus has always been the fairest of flowers, the emblem and embodiment of beauty and purity.

Except the medallions showing the upper surface of a single full-blown flower²³, it is the whole lotus plant that is generally represented on the Railing. This plant

²¹Hastings, J. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. IV (1911), p. 144 f.

²²Hastings, J. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. IV (1911), p. 128 f.

²³Cf. central lotus in Pls. IX-XI.

consists of a rhizome, with nodes at regular intervals, each node giving rise to numerous independent stems containing leaves and flowers and buds. The idea of a creeping submerged rootlike stem which throws off the blossoms is thus always present. This is always the case whether the plant rises from the Vase of Plenty (Pl. XI, *b*), or issues from the mouth (Pl. XVII, *b*) or navel (Pl. XVII, *a*) of the squatting Yaksha, or winds its meandering course along the Copping (Pl. II) or the medallion (Pls. X, *a*; XII, *d*; XV, *c*). The suggestion is thus always there that this plant which, according to the tenets of "Water Cosmology", is the Tree of Life, the source of all creation, belongs to water.

That the Tree of Life belonged to and originated in the waters appear to be more directly suggested by two of the crossbar reliefs at Bharhut. The former (Pl. XII, *a*) in actuality depicts a lotus-pond (*padma-sarasi*) teeming with a multitude of lotuses, both *padmas* and *utpalas*, together with leaves and buds. The other (Pl. XII, *b*) shows a lotus plant, no doubt, the Tree of Life, arising, not from the Vase of Plenty (*Pūrṇaghaṭa*) or from the Yaksha's mouth or navel, but from the apex of a triangle. This triangle, no doubt, represents a submerged hill, like the Maināka Mountain of later Paurāṇik mythology, thus indicating the Tree of Life's aquatic associations. However, in Paurāṇik mythology, the Maināka Mountain is never described as the source of the Tree of Life; and as the decorative art of Bharhut depicts a more primitive and archaic stratum of the Creation Myths, it is more probable that the triangle in reality represents the Primordial Hill of the earliest Indo-Aryan tradition (*giri, adri or parvata*), which was believed to have arisen in the first stage of Creation from the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean, and from which again the Tree of Life or the World Tree grew in the second stage of Creation²⁴. The Bharhut relief, therefore, not only indicates the lotus plant's associations with the waters, but depicting, as it does, one of the earliest cosmogonic legends of the Indians, it also refers to the tree of Life's metaphysical origins from the very fundamentals of the cosmos beneath the oceans.

But what is more important to note is that the lotus is not only supposed to be associated with water, or the plant to represent the Tree of Life, but that there existed a continuous tradition according to which it symbolically represents the waters; and so, the plant itself may be taken to be the source of all Creation in this Universe; and secondarily, the earth which, like the lotus-flower, rests on the water. Thus, a passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*²⁵ says, "The lotus means the waters; and this earth is a leaf thereof; even as the lotus leaf here lies spread on the waters, so this earth lies spread on the waters".

The botanical structure of the plant is also suggestive of its appropriateness to serve as a reproductive life-symbol. As represented at Bharhut, in nature also, the

²⁴See *ante.*, p. 22.

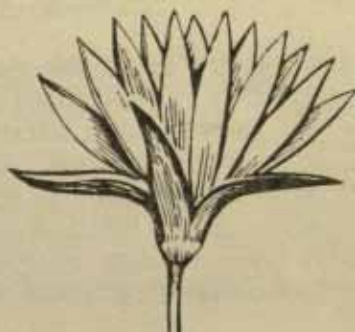
²⁵*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, VII, 4. 1.8.



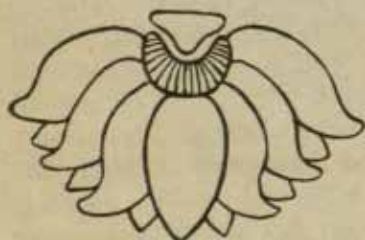
(a) *Nelumbo nucifera*,
(modern botanical drawing)



(e) Egyptian lily of the
South, conventional
form.



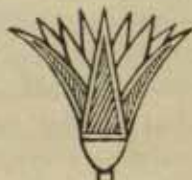
(f) *Nymphaea stellata*
(modern botanical drawing)



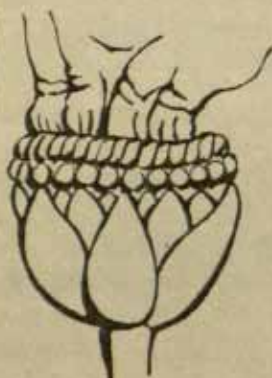
(b) Lotus on pillar half-medallion
(No. 42), Bhambur



(g) Egyptian lotuses as depicted on
Egyptian monuments of the 18th
Dynasty.



(c)

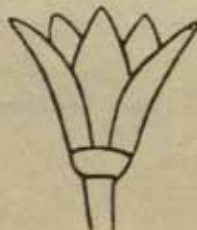


(d)

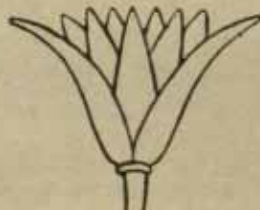
(c) & (d) Various types of lotus-pedestals
(padma-pithas), pillar chamber
sculpture, Nos. 245 and 25, Bhambur.



(h) Blue lotus, paintings on
late Assyrian vases.



(i)



(j)

(i) & (j) Blue lotus (utpala), on the
Coping (i) and medallions
(j) at Bhambur.

plant consists of a rootlike stem or rhizome which creeps along the bottom of the pool, producing nodes at intervals. Each node bursts into fresh rootlets which get embedded into the bottom of the pool. From each junction of the rootlets with the node comes out more stems, which then rise separately to the surface of the water, on which the flowers, leaves and buds blossom. Thus, the habit of growth of the lotus plant serve "as a perfect image of the continuous perpetuation of life originating in the waters"²⁶.

In this connection, mention may be made of the "lotus simile", found in a number of passages in the Buddhist canon²⁷ in which the Buddha is likened to a lotus flower which, though born in water, remains undrenched and unsullied, no matter how impure may be the water of the pool, as had been the Buddha himself, who being born in this earth full of *āsava*s (imperfections) rose above them and remained unsoiled and pure. The conception of the Buddha as a supramundane (*lokuttara*) Being emerged very early in Buddhism, and the Bharhut artists might have found in the lotus a device to represent this aspect of the "Buddha conception".

In whatever way the Buddhists may interpret it, there is, however, no doubt that to the Indians the lotus has always mainly remained a symbol for life and creation.

The Plant Style of decoration consists of the following motifs :—

(1) Full-blown Lotus flower (Pls. IX—XI and Fig. 2, *a-d*)— These occur in profusion on the medallions of the pillars and cross-bars and also on the outer face of the Coping. For this reason the Railing is called the *Padmavara Veditkā*. In the full medallions the flower is shown in its entirety (Pls. IX—XI); in the half medallions only a half of the design can be accommodated in their semicircular compass (Pl. XX, *a, b*). The flowers are all Indian lotuses (*padma*) of which the botanical name is *Nelumbium speciosum* or *Nelumbo nucifera* (Fig. 2, *a*). They are depicted as if shown from the top. In the centre is the circular pericarp (*karyikā*) with the ends of the seed-capsules (carpels) in position. The pericarp is surrounded by a circle of thread-like stamens. These in turn are encircled by the spreading petals. The flowers are generally of the hundred-petalled (*śatadalapadma*) variety. The petals of the front row are shown in their entirety placed side by side around the circle of stamens. The tips of those the back rows are shown peeping through the upper ends of the front row. In the majority of cases, the petals are shown spread in such a way that their tips point outwards, that is, towards the circumference of the medallion away from the pericarp. But in a few examples (23, 58, 65, 152), they are shown to droop and double back over the circle of stamens with their tips pointed inwards towards the inner pericarp.

²⁶Irwin, J., "Asokan Pillars: a reassessment of the evidence: Part III: Capitals", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 117 (Oct., 1975), p. 640.

²⁷Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Vol. II, p. 32.

(Pls. IX, *b*, *c*). Great variety has thus been produced within the type, so that no lotus appears to be an exact copy of the other.

A sub-variety within the motif consists of those medallions that contain a human bust, either male or female, within a full-blown lotus flower (Pls. XIII-XV). In these reliefs the human bust takes the place of the pericarp and the spreading petals and stamens serve as border around it. Most of these busts are decked with rich attire and ornaments. Variety within the type is produced by such expedients as when a man (Pls. XIII, *d*; XIV, *d*) or a woman (Pl. XIII, *c*) carries a lotus or some other flower, or a woman is engaged in her toilet holding a mirror in her hand (Pl. XIV, *a*). Generally the cross-bars of the middle row of the Railing contain the bust-bearing medallions. All the five middle row cross-bars of the South-Eastern Quadrant contain such human, both male and female, busts on the medallions of the inner face, one of them being that of a lady engaged in her toilet holding a mirror in her left hand (Pl. XIV, *a*), known in Indian iconographic texts as *darpaṇā*. It is interesting to note that in this particular representation, the lady is shown wearing an *aṅkuṣa*-shaped tattoo-mark on the left cheek just below the left eye. Another medallion (67) on a pillar has a lotus containing a male bust with a grotesque face decorated all over with tattoo-marks, a snub nose with broad nostrils and long conical asinine ears (Pl. XV, *b*). This may represent a Yaksha, whose image has been shaped after the contemporary type of aboriginal tribal people of Central India.

Some scholars are inclined to think that these busts represent some sort of divinities. Taking the stamens, which surround the face in place of the pericarp, to be the rays of the sun, some of them tentatively identified the male figures as *Sūrya*. Majumdar, however, appears to have hinted at the correct line of investigation when he says that "they (*i.e.*, the busts) perhaps represent the contemporary type of wealthy citizen or member of the aristocratic family²⁸".

From his own investigations the present author has come to the conclusion that the busts on the pillar medallions may represent some sort of divinities, possibly Yakshas and Yakshis or some deities associated with "Water Cosmology". For example, the grotesque bust just referred to (Pl. XV, *b*) appears to be no other than that of a Yaksha. Similarly, the lady shown upto the waist inside a roundel in medallion No. 219 (Pl. XV, *c*) is perhaps no other than a Yakshi, personification of the reproductive spirit residing within the lotus plant (Tree of Life) held by the Yaksha squatting below. But those on the cross-bar medallions appear in reality to be the portraits of the donors who dedicated them. All these bust-bearing cross-bars contain dedicatory inscriptions recording the names of the donors who made that particular gift. It is found from these records that, except in two cases (96, Pl. XIII, *b* and 102, Pl. XIII, *a*), the cross-bar that bears a male bust is the gift of a gentleman, and that

²⁸Majumdar, N. G., *Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum, Part I* (1937), p. 17.

which has a female bust is the gift of a lady. Two of the cross-bars bear male busts on both faces, viz., 138 (Pl. XIV, *c*) and 147 on a cross-bar of the South-East Quadrant and 193 and 200 (Pl. XIV, *d*) on one of the Return in front of the Gateway. In both these cases the two busts on either face of a particular cross-bar are completely identical and appear to possess the same individual features, as should be in the case of a portrait. One of the cross-bars, a gift of a gentleman *Isāna*, bears a male bust on one face (120, Pl. XIII, *d*) and a female bust on the other (165, Pl. XIII, *c*). The male bust, no doubt, is that of *Isāna*, the donor; and the female bust appears to represent his wife, who might have accompanied her husband in his pilgrimage and taken part in his act of piety. It should be noted in this connection that the *Dharmaśāstras* enjoin the wife as *sahadharminī*, to participate in the religious acts (*dharma-karma*) and the acts of piety (*dānakarma*) of the husband.

Generally, the full-blown lotuses of both the sub-groups are placed within a circular border which may be a plain or ornamented flat moulding (Pls. IX, *a, d*; XI, *b, d*), a twisted rope (Pl. X, *a, b, c*), a row of beads (Pls. IX, *b*; XI, *c*), or bead-and-reel (Pl. X, *d*) or a border of wreaths. Beyond this border there are other ornaments, floral, animal and geometric, forming an outer-ring around the flower, e.g., a row of winged lions (Pl. XI, *c*), or elephants carrying lotuses in their trunks (Pl. XI, *d*), or pecking geese and swans (Pl. XI, *a*), an array of serpents' heads (Pl. XX, *d*), a meandering lotus creeper with full-blown lotuses (*padma*) and/or "blue lotuses" (*utpala*) and buds (Pls. X, *a*; XII, *d*)—in one instance the meandering creeper is shown issuing out of a pot (Pl. XI, *b*)—a meandering vine creeper with leaves and bunches of grapes (Pl. X, *b*), various sorts of floral designs (Pls. IX, *a*; X, *c*) and scroll-work (Pl. IX, *b*), and geometrical patterns like hatched chevrons (Pl. XIII, *c, d*) etc. These outer borders, particularly those of the animals and meandering creepers, give an illusion of perpetual movement around the fixity of the full-blown lotus flower in the centre. In some instances the border of moulding, rope design etc., between the central lotus and the outer ring of ornament is missing, and the full-blown lotus is directly surrounded by an outer row of lotus petals (Pl. IX, *c*). Medallion No. 162 (Pl. XII, *c*) on the outer face of a pillar deserves particular notice. Here there is no inner border around the lotus, nor any outer ring of floral, animal or geometric ornament as is usual in the majority of cases. A large full-blown lotus covers the entire field, with row after row of petals (actually seven rows), one beyond the other, each row peeping through the interspaces of the row below, making a ripple design of much beauty and novelty around the first row of petals.

Altogether 114 full-blown lotus-medallions and 13 bust-bearing lotus-medallions are displayed in the Bharhut Gallery. Of these 101 full-blown lotuses and 11 bust-bearing lotuses are contained in 64 cross-bars; and 13 full-blown lotuses and 2 bust-bearing lotuses are on the full medallions of 11 pillars. All the bust-bearing medallions of the cross-bars belong to the middle row.

Besides the lotus medallions just referred to, showing the top surface of a single full-blown flower, there are some other representations, both in medallions where the whole plant is to be seen and on the chamfered edges of the pillars where they serve as pedestals (*pīṭha*) for the human and animal figures, which show the flowers in peculiar stylized renderings. Here, like the "blue lotuses" (*utpala*), the flowers are shown in the profile, and two varieties of these representations may be discerned. Some show a full-blown flower that has just blossomed being in the prime of its youth and beauty with the tips of the petals pointing upwards (Pl. VIII, *e*; Fig. 2, *d*). The others, and these form the majority, show a flower which is not only full-blown, but appears to be over-blown, just before fading out, with all the petals drooping down touching the stem below, completely exposing the pericarp and the stamens (Pl. VIII, *c*, Fig. 2, *c*). In some of the representations of this variety, the flower is heart-shaped (Pl. VIII, *c*); in others, it assumes the form of a rimless globular pot (*ghaṭa*) covered with a large lid (Pl. XV, *d*).

Coomaraswamy held that the so-called "bells" of the Aśokan capitals derived their origin from some prototype resembling stylized lotuses of the second variety just referred to. He thought that the "bell", "cable-moulding" and abacus of these capitals correspond to the drooping petals, stamens and pericarp of a stylized lotus of this type,²⁹ which must have inspired the artists in inventing the capitals. Irwin, however, thinks that Coomaraswamy's proposition is "too weak to convince anybody but the already convinced."³⁰

There appears to be much convincing argument in Irwin's contention that the Aśokan capitals derived their peculiar shape and form from the technicalities involved in the manufacture of portable *dhvajās* (some of which are depicted on the Bharhut Railing cf. Pl. III, *d*) which, being in the aesthetic lineage of the monumental pillars, must have served as their prototypes.³¹ These portable *dhvajās* had their shafts made of wood and their emblems of copper. In the preparation of these standards (*dhvajās*) the copper emblem must have been fitted to the top of the wooden pole by means of a metallic tennon or dowel, similar to the one which fixed the Ram-purva Lion Capital to the corresponding shaft. This would have necessitated drilling a hole in the top surface of the pole; and to prevent the tendency of the wooden pole to split, especially as the metallic emblem must have been heavy in relation to the light wooden shaft, the outside of the top portion of the pole would have to be bound with cord in several windings. Such horizontal binding, interrupting the upward flow of the eye to the crowning emblem, would inevitably have spoilt the artistic effect of the whole composition; and to counteract this, the horizontal binding would have to be

²⁹Coomaraswamy, A. K., "Origin of the Lotus (so-called Bell) Capitals", *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (1930), pp. 372-75.

³⁰Irwin, J., *ibid.*, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 117, p. 638.

³¹Irwin, J., *ibid.*, pp. 638-39.

covered by hanging drapery. This would have imparted a slight bulge to the top portion of the shaft where the binding was done, just below the emblem; and this explains the swelling contour of the Aśokan "bells". Thus, according to Irwin, the Aśokan "bell" is "a fossilization in stone of a device which originated in cord and fabric" as the solution of a practical problem. Consequently, he refuses to acknowledge the "bell" to be a true lotiform, and thinks that Coomaraswamy based his theory on some "untypical details of lotus treatment in the stone-reliefs at Bharhut"²² which are a century later than Aśoka.

It should, however, be noted that the variety of lotus treatment (Fig. 2, c; Pl. VIII, c) which, according to Coomaraswamy, led the artists to invent the Aśokan "bell", is not untypical at Bharhut. On the other hand, lotuses depicted in this manner of treatment far outnumber the other variety (Fig. 2, d; Pl. VIII, d), indicating a long-standing tradition of representing the lotus-pedestal (*padma-piṭha*) in this way. The Bharhut evidence also leaves no room for doubt that, like the "bells" of Aśokan capitals, the lotus, particularly in the peculiar stylization found at Bharhut, was thought a fit pedestal (*piṭha*) for figures of gods, men and animals. Moreover, some of the lotuses of this variety found on the Bharhut Railing (Pl. XXII, a; Fig 2, b) bear a very close resemblance to the bulging profile of the Aśokan "bells"; and so, the Aśokan "bells" may be thought to represent, if not to have originated after, a prototype of this variety of the lotus.

Most scholars take the Aśokan "bell" to represent an inverted lotus, Irwin, who refuses to accept the lotiform nature of the "bell", thinks that the artists of India could not have depicted their most sacred of flowers with so little regard or feeling for its true floral character. We, on our part, do not think that the Aśokan "bell" represents the *inverted* lotus. Like the Bharhut specimens we are dealing with, the "bell", according to us, in reality represents the flower in a particular stage of its blossoming when all the petals have drooped down with their tips pointing downwards completely exposing the pericarp. That this variety of the lotus found favour with the Indian artists as a fit pedestal for the gods is attested by the so-called "double-petalled lotus" (*viśvapadma*) which is found to form the seat (*piṭha*) for many a bronze and stone image of deities in later times, in which the upper row of petals are shown with their tips pointing upwards while those of the lower row have their tips pointed downwards. In some instances, the upper row of petals is missing and only the lower row remains, exposing, as at Bharhut, the pericarp on which the god is seated. We, therefore, find no obstruction in taking the Aśokan "bells" to be stylized lotuses as depicted on the Bharhut Railing. Moreover, as the Axis of the World, the Aśokan pillar may very well be thought to represent the Tree of Life (*vanaspati*), sometimes thought also to be a lotus plant; and as such, might very well be surmounted by a lotus flower which symbolize both the act of actual Creation and

²²Irwin, J. *Ibid.*, p. 638.

also the earth that serve as the resting ground for all things. In whatever way they might have originated, there seems to be no doubt that the makers of the capitals took the "bells" to be *padmapiṭhas*, and tried to give them the shape of lotuses, however stylized they might have been.

In this connection, reference should be made to the over-blown lotus on the central upright stem of the plant growing out of a triangular eminence depicted in Pl. XII, *b*. This flower has a bulging profile which is very similar to that of the one depicted in Pl. XXII, *a*. The tips of the drooping petals in both the illustrations flare outwards. This has imparted to them a profile which closely resembles that of the Aśokan "bells". As a matter of fact, the straight shaft of the stem depicted in Pl. XII, *b*, surmounted, as it is, by an overblown lotus of that particular style of rendering simulates the appearance of an Aśokan pillar. Had the slender shaft of the stem been tapering and proportionate in its girth to the surmounting lotus (in the illustration under consideration the lotus is too large and heavy for the slender stem supporting it), there would have been no difficulty in taking it as a representation of an Aśokan column. In our opinion, this particular depiction of a blossoming lotus plant fully substantiates Coomaraswamy's contention that the Aśokan "bells" originated after some prototype of this style of the lotus rendering. It also appears to indicate that the Aśokan column symbolizing, as it was, the Tree of Life, was considered by the Indians to stand for a lotus plant originating from the fundamentals of the universe.^{22A}

(2) "Blue Lotus" (*Utpala*) (Pls. X, *a*; XX, *b* and Fig. 2, *f-f*)—Besides the Indian lotus (*padma*, *Nelumbo nucifera*), another variety of the flower, having a tall, tumbler-like, gradually flaring profile, is also seen on the Railing. In the books on Indian iconography this variety of the flower is known as the "Blue Lotus" or *utpala*, the emblem of the Buddhist goddess Śyāmātārā. These occur mainly on a band of decoration forming the upper border to the meandering creeper (*kalpavalli*) on the Coping (Pl. II) and also on similar borders along the half-medallions of the pillars (Pl. XX, *b*). In either case, they occur in vertical position along with the "stepped merlons", filling up the space between two adjacent merlons, in which their triangular profile fitted finely. They are also sometimes shown as coming out of the same plant bearing stylized representations of the Indian lotus (Pl. XII, *d*); and in pillar-medallion No. 23 (Pl. XII, *a*), which according to our interpretation, depicts a lotus-pond (*padma-sarasī*), both the varieties, *padma* and *utpala*, are shown growing in the same pool.

^{22A} Irwin's remark while criticising Coomaraswamy's views about the origin of the Aśokan "bell" capital (cf. Irwin, J., *ibid.*, p. 638), "Knowing that Coomaraswamy began his career as a botanist one is tempted to see it as the special pleading of the erstwhile botanist riding his hobbyhorse!", appears to us to be unfounded and too strong for that great art historian. Coomaraswamy might have begun his career as a botanist; but by his industry and perseverance he acquired a deep and penetrating insight into Indian art which served as a beacon light in illuminating many obscure chapters of the history of art in our country.

This shows that to the artists of Bharhut both *padma* and *utpala* appeared to be basically the same, and symbolized the same thing, viz., the primordial waters. The "blue lotus" thus formed an integral element in the iconography of "Water Cosmology", and this accounts for its presence on the Railing.

Majumdar opines that their treatment "somewhat in the Assyrian style"²³ points to Western Asia as the source from where this motif entered the domain of Indian art.²⁴ Majumdar appears to be right in his basic contention. In amplification of his opinion it may be stated that the "blue lotus" at Bharhut is really a copy of the stylized representation of the Egyptian lotus, known to botanists as the *Nymphaea stellata*²⁵ (Fig. 2, f). A comparison of the flowers as represented on Egyptian and Mesopotamian (Assyrian) monuments and on the Bharhut Railing (Fig. 2, g-f) will convince the reader of the pertinacity of our contention. It should, however, be noted that the *Nymphaea stellata* is not native in Mesopotamia and the Levant; and so, the West Asians (i.e., the Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks of Asia Minor and the Iranians) were not acquainted with the flower at first hand. The species grows in the wild state in the marshes of the Nile, and its representation occurs in many of the early monuments of the Egyptians. The West Asians, therefore, must have borrowed this motif from the Egyptians. Egyptian influence came to Western Asia in two separate ways, viz., (1) direct from Egypt after conquest by Cambyses in 525 B. C. when Egyptian craftsmen were brought to Iran; and (2) via the arts of the Levant and Asia Minor where Egyptian influences had been assimilated from a much earlier period. Egyptian art seems to have exerted its most formative influence in Western Asia in the 15th and 14th centuries B. C. coinciding with the military expeditions of the Pharaohs in Palestine and Syria.

It is difficult to determine how and when this foreign motif entered India. The occurrence, as we shall see, of the human-headed bull, winged lion and the stepped merlon on the Bharhut Railing, all of which are to be found on the monuments of the Achaemenians, appear to point to Achaemenian Iran as the immediate source of influence. There is no doubt, as will be apparent from a study of the reliefs, particularly the so-called "honey-suckle" motif, on the capitals of the Aśokan pillars, that much of this foreign influence entered India during Mauryan and pre-Mauryan times from Achaemenid Iran. But the contributions of the Śakas, who during their sojourn in Hellenistic Bactria and Arsacid Parthia and Eastern Iran imbibed much of these cultures, should also be taken into consideration. From a study

²³Majumdar, N. G., *Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum, Part I* (1938), p. 16.

²⁴Majumdar, N. G., *ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁵All varieties of lotuses come under the botanical family *Nymphaeaceae*. It includes among its genera *Nelumbo* and *Nymphaea*, to which respectively belong the Indian and Egyptian species.

of early Mathura art it appears that many foreign motifs and conventions of art were re-introduced in India during the centuries immediately preceeding and following the Christian era when the Śakas and the Kushāṇas were the masters of North-western India with Mathura as one of the centres of their domination. Some of the foreign motifs may, therefore, come to Bharhut from Eastern Iran *via* Mathura during post-Mauryan times.

It should also be noted here that the *Nymphaea stellata*, known variously as *kumuda*, *sāplā*, and *śāluk*, is also native in India, growing profusely in various parts of the country; in some parts of eastern India it is more common than the lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) and grows in the same pool along with the latter as depicted in Bharhut medallion No. 23 (Pl. XII, *a*), its edible stem forming a delicacy to many of the peoples of the eastern regions. The possibility of an independent origin of the "*utpala*" motif in Indian art from a naturalistic rendering of the flower by the Indians themselves cannot, therefore, be discarded altogether. So far as the author's knowledge goes, no doubt has yet been expressed regarding the indigenous origin of the lotus (*padma*) motif in Indian art. Similar may also be the case with the "*utpala*" motif, as the Indians must have been acquainted with both the flowers from very early times.

A scrutiny of the *utpalas* depicted on the Bharhut Railing enables us to discern two styles of rendering for this flower. Those on the Coping (Pl. XX, *b*) appear to be more stylized, their longish tumbler-like profile adhering more closely to their West Asiatic prototypes; while those on some of the medallions (Pl. X, *a*; XII, *a*) are less stylized and more naturalistic. These are more squatty and their profile is more flaring than those depicted on the Coping. A glance will convince anyone of this difference, and also of the fact that the *utpalas* on the medallions are suffused with a warmth of naturalness that those on the Coping lack. Are we to account for this difference in the spirit of rendering by the theory of two separate origins for this motif in Indian art, one indigenous, the other foreign? The weight of the evidence at present available to us on the subject, as well as the history of the so-called "honey-suckle" and other foreign motifs in early Indian art, however, inclines us to hold that the "*utpala*" motif was originally introduced into India from Western Asia; but in the course of its adaptation in India, the Indian artists, who were acquainted with the flower from the beginning, endowed it with a warmth of naturalness that is peculiarly Indian.

(3) **Honey-suckle** (Fig. 3).—In a few of the cross-bar medallions (Pls. XVI, *a, b*), and on the sides of the quadruple animal capitals surmounting the *Toraṇa* pillars, as well as on the pinnacle crowning the Gateway (Pl. I; Fig. 3, *f*) appear a floral motif which has been designated by scholars as the "honey-suckle". This motif is also found on the abaci of some of the Aśokan capitals, e.g., those found at Sankisa, Allahabad, Rampurva (Bull) and Sanchi. The occurrence of this motif on the Indian monuments



i. SANKISA



(d) Honey-suckle (anthemion) ornament on the Doric entablature, Thymele, Temple of Aesclepius, Epidaurus, c. 330 B.C.



ii. ALLAHABAD



(e) Honey-suckle (anthemion) ornament on pilaster capital, Temple of Apollo, Didyma, c. 310 B.C.



iii. RAMPURVA BULL

(a) Honey-suckle (anthemion) on the abaci of Aeolian capitals, 3rd century B.C.



(b) Greek anthemion, sculptured frieze, Erechtheion, Athens, 420-382 B.C.



(f) Honey-suckle ornament over the Bharhut Torana, early 1st century B.C.



(c) Aschamend anthemion, decoration on amphora, early 5th century, B.C.

has been claimed by many as evidence of Hellenistic influence reaching India from the empire of the Seleucids and their successors in Bactria and Eastern Iran.

Irwin, however, has clearly pointed out that the term "honey-suckle" was a misnomer, being applied by modern Hellenic scholars of Western Europe to a Greek decorative motif which the Greeks themselves called the "anthemion", from *anthos*, "a flower", and therefore, simply meant a floral design²⁶. The anthemion, however, is a particular type of floral scroll-work which was used by the Greeks strictly for ornamentation of the *cyma recta* mouldings of cornices and pillars. In the Aśokan capitals this ornament was used to decorate the vertical faces of the abaci. Here the individual flowers are connected by a continuous stem which resembles the lotus rhizome. At Bharhut the flowers are shown singly arising out of lotuses.

The evidence at our disposal shows that the Greeks, Iranians, and possibly also the Indians, alike borrowed the anthemion from Western Asia, particularly the region that stretched from Mesopotamia through the Levant to Anatolia. The motif, however, did not originate in Western Asia, but was introduced into this region by the Egyptians, possibly during the period of military expeditions of the Pharaohs of the 18th and 19th dynasties in Syria and Palestine during the 15th and 14th centuries B.C. Because, as has been shown by Irwin²⁷, the ultimate source of the anthemion was the Egyptian lotus (*Nymphaea stellata*) and the Egyptian Lily or "Lily of the South" as stylized in Egyptian art.

We have already stated how the stylized representations of the Egyptian lotus (*Nymphaea stellata*) on the monuments of Egypt served as the ultimate prototype for the "blue lotuses" (*utpala*) on the Bharhut Railing. Fig. 3 will show how along with the lotus (*Nymphaea stellata*) the Egyptian "Lily of the South" also played its part in the formation of the anthemion. In the renderings of this motif on Assyrian, Greek and Achaemenid monuments the lotus and the lily are placed alternately, all coming out of a continuous stem (Fig. 3, *b*, *c*). On the abacus of the Rampurva Bull capital also the two flowers appear as alternately placed (Fig. 3, *a*, *iii*), all coming out of a rhizome. On the Sankissa and Allahabad abaci, however, the rhizome is missing and the flowers are shown to rise directly on the astragalus border (Fig. 3, *a*, *i*, *ii*). In its stylized renderings on the Egyptian monuments the petals of the "Lily of the South" are shown arranged like a spreading fan (Fig. 2, *e*). This appears to serve as the prototype (no doubt through Achaemenid and Greek renderings of the same as illustrated in Fig. 3, *b*, *c*) for the fan-like arrangement of the petals of a flower which alternates with another having petals resembling serpents' hoods in the abaci of the Aśokan capitals (Fig. 3, *a*, *i*, *ii*, *iii*). In the Bharhut pinnacle (Fig. 3, *f*) also the tip of each petal is seen to droop

²⁶Irwin, J., "Aśokan Pillars; a reassessment of the Evidence: Part III: Capitals," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 117 (October, 1975), pp. 639-40.

²⁷Irwin, J., *ibid.*, pp. 639-40.

over the body of the same, thus giving the appearance of serpent's hood to the individual petals. Though far removed from the stylized renderings of the Egyptian lotus (*Nymphaea stellata*) on the Egyptian (Fig. 2, g), Greek (Fig. 3, b) and Achaemenid (Fig. 3, c) monuments, there could have been no doubt that these flowers on the Aśokan abaci and the one forming the pinnacle ornament over the Bharhut *Torāṇa* represent the stylized Indian version of the *Nymphaea stellata*, the Indian artists making the individual petals turn inwards thus imparting them the semblance of serpents' hoods (Fig. 3, a and f) instead of making them flare outwards like their Achaemenid and Greek predecessors (Fig. 3, b and c). If we are in search of parallels for them outside India, the closest similarity for the Bharhut pinnacle ornament (and for that matter for the similar flowers on the Aśokan abaci) are to be found in the decorative anthemion on the Doric entablature of the Thymele (*tholos* sanctuary) inside the temple of Aesclepius at Epidaurus (now in the Epidaurus Museum) built about 330 B.C. (Fig. 3, d)²⁸ and in similar decorations on pilaster capitals in the temple of Apollo (known as the Didymeum) at Didyma built about 310 B.C. (Fig. 3, e)²⁹. As a matter of fact, the Didyma decorations resemble similar decorations on the Aśokan abaci and the Bharhut pinnacle ornament more closely than those on the entablature of the Thymele at Epidaurus. We, therefore, hold that the so-called "honey-suckle" (anthemion) motif as found on the Aśokan abaci and in the pinnacle ornament of the Bharhut *Torāṇa* owes more to contact with the Hellenistic West after the conquest of Alexander the Great than to influences coming from the empire of the Achaemenids.

A comparison of the anthemion motif as found on the Greek, Iranian and Indian monuments will show that though derived from the same common source, in the process of naturalization in the countries of their adoption, it had become so much transformed and so peculiarly adapted to the tastes and genius of the people who adopted it that the common inheritance is obscured to a great extent. Thus the Greek rendering is symmetrical and orderly; the Achaemenid, stiff and strictly decorative; while the Indian is flamboyant and naturalistic and transcending the bounds of the purely decorative is infused with a vividness that comes from a deep understanding of the symbolism.

It will be apparent from the above discussion that the so-called "honey-suckle" (anthemion) in reality represented two flowers, the lotus and the lily, both of which symbolized the waters and also the Tree of Life originating in it. It is doubtful if the Greeks, Iranians and Indians were aware that the anthemion represented the lotus. We

²⁸Charbonneaux, J., Martin, R., and Villard, F., *Classical Greek Art*, (Thames & Hudson, 1972), Pl. 62 on p. 62. Epidaurus is a city in Argolis in the Peloponnesus in mainland Greece.

²⁹Charbonneaux, J., Martin, R., and Villard, F., *Hellenistic Art*, (Thames and Hudson, 1973), Pls. 24 and 26 on pp. 30 and 31 respectively. Didyma is a town 12 miles south of Miletus in Asia Minor.

have already noted that the West Asians (*i.e.*, the people of the Levant and Mesopotamia), who served as intermediaries in the migration of this motif, were not themselves acquainted with the lotus at first hand. However, the West Asians, Greeks, Iranians and Indians alike possibly saw in the anthemion a general symbol of fecundity and prosperity, which accounts for its adoption by these people. In the process of transplantation and acclimatization in India, where the lotus (*padma*) was symbolic of similar qualities, the anthemion ("honey-suckle") appears to have absorbed some of the symbolic attributes of the lotus (*padma*). They might have become equivalent to each other. This appears to account for the super-imposition of the "honey-suckle" over a lotus or half-lotus at Bharhut, whereby this foreign motif became a part of "Water Cosmology".

In medallions Nos. 89 (Pl. XVI, *a*) and 131 (Pl. XVI, *b*) and also on the sides of the quadruple animal capitals a peculiar motif is to be seen which is also taken to be a stylized form of the so-called "honey-suckle". In reality, however, it appears to represent a "palmette". The date-palm was a sacred tree among the Babylonians and Assyrians of Mesopotamia; the stylized representation of the leaves of that tree, known as the "palmette" was also considered to be a sacred symbol. This points to Mesopotamia as the centre of origin of this motif from where it was disseminated to various countries, including India.

On medallion 131 (Pl. XVI, *b*) the central part of the motif certainly represents some sort of palm leaf, possibly the Indian betel-nut (*guvāka*) palm. The side leaves having serrated edges also appear to represent some other variety of palm leaves, possibly the date-palm. In this representation of the "palmette", two winged horses (*valāhaka-aśva*), one on either side of the central leaf, are seen to dart out in opposite directions. The two bunches of flowers or fruits, flanking the central *guvāka* leaf on either side, possibly represent bunches of fruit-bearing flowers of the same tree (*guvāka-mañjarī*).

In medallion 89 (Pl. XVI, *a*) also the side leaves, which are serrated as in 131 (Pl. XVI, *b*), appear to be nothing but leaves of the date-palm tree; and lotus-rosettes are shown in the empty spaces between the individual leaves. The central upright branch, having tentacle-like growths along either side of its length, appears to represent the rhachis (*mañjarī-daṇḍā*), blossoming into young shoots and spikes of the date-palm (*kharjura-navamañjarī*). The bud-like growths flanking the motif possibly represent bunches of date-palm fruits.

(4) **Flowering Plant coming out of a squatting Male Figure** (Pl. XVII, *a, b*)—Some of the medallions show a flowering plant coming out of the mouth (Pl. XVII, *b*) or the navel (Pl. XVII, *a*) of a squatting male figure. A variant of this motif appears as a border to a roundel showing a female figure upto the waist (possibly a Yakshi) in

medallion No. 219 (Pl. XV, c). This shows a squatting male figure holding in his hands either end of a flowering plant which by its meanders encircles the roundel.

In this connection, mention may be made of a terracotta sealing found at Harappa which shows a flowering plant coming out of the genitals of a reclining female figure.⁴⁰ It appears likely that the Harappa sealing represents the prototype of an aspect of the Great Goddess (*Devī*), known in later literature as Śākambhari, "the herb-bearing lady". In the "Devī-Māhātmya" section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* the goddess herself says how life-sustaining vegetables shall grow out of her own body (*ātmadehasa-mudbhavaiḥ*) during the rainy season, and thereby, she should be known on earth as Śākambhari.⁴¹ There could have been no doubt that in the "Devī māhātmya" passage the Great Goddess (*Devī*) identifies herself with Mother Earth, who as the *doyen* of the fertility cults, gives birth to all the plants and herbs of the world actually from her own body.

In the Bharhut reliefs, however, the flowering plant is shown coming out of a male, and not a female, figure. The significance and symbology of the Bharhut reliefs, therefore, appear to be completely different from those of the figure on the Harappa sealing, and can best be brought out, as has been done by Coomaraswamy⁴², by reference to a number of Vedic passages according to which, "actual creation takes the form of the origination of a tree from the navel of a Primeval Male, who rests upon the waters." This Primeval Male appears originally to be a Yaksha, and in early Vedic texts was identified with Varuṇa, originally the greatest of the Vedic gods. In later sectarian literature his function was usurped by Viṣṇu as Padmanābha in the myth of Anantaśayin Viṣṇu.

The significance of the navel (*nābhī*) as the seat of the life-force is set forth in some of the later Vedic passages. Thus, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁴³ the sacrificer (*yajamāna*) hangs a golden disk round his neck so that it rests upon his navel; and the text explains, "Why over the navel? (Because) the navel is the seed, the power of procreation, and the gold disk represents vital energy and vigour." Again, in the *Hiraṇyakeśin Gṛīhya Sūtra*⁴⁴ the navel is described as the "centre of life-breaths" (*prāṇāḥ*)⁴⁵.

⁴⁰Vats, M. S., *Excavations at Harappa*, Vol. II, Pl. XCIII, 304.

⁴¹*Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Cantos 81-93.

⁴²Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Part II (Reprint edn., 1971), pp. 24-26.

⁴³*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, V, 7.1.9.

⁴⁴*Hiraṇyakeśin Gṛīhya Sūtra*, I, 6, 24, 1.

⁴⁵For the significance of the Navel of the Earth, see *ante*, pp. 23-24. The creative significance of the navel appears also in Avestan mythology in connection with Apām Napāt, the "son of the waters", the word also meaning "navel of the waters". In this connection, reference may also be made to the Greek myths about the *omphalos* or "Navel of the Earth", which was worshipped as fertility symbol.

According to Paurāṇik mythology, Brahmā, the Creator, was born from the lotus that sprang from Vishṇu's navel, which represented the centre of energy of the Universe, when the great god (also called Nārāyaṇa, "he who moves on the waters", from *nāra*=water + *ayana*=to move), intent on creation, was reclining on the waters⁴⁶. This tradition, however, appeared much earlier in a number of Vedic passages. Thus, in the *Ṛigveda*⁴⁷, it is said that "Prior to the sky, prior to this earth, prior to the Asuras and gods, the waters held that germ primeval in which all the gods existed; on the navel of the Unborn stood that on which all beings stood." Again, in the *Yajurveda*⁴⁸, Viśvakarman (Prajāpati) is born from the navel of the Unborn in waters. "Unborn" is one of the early designations of the "World-ground before it developed into the Cosmos", later identified with Puruṣa, Prajāpati, Brahman; and with the development of theism, Viṣṇu as the cosmic god Nārāyaṇa appropriated the formula.

It should, however, be noted that in the *Ṛigveda*⁴⁹, it was Varuṇa who was described as the root of the Tree of Life, the source of all Creation, and also as the Unborn; while in the *Atharva-veda*⁵⁰, we read, "That one is called a great Yaksha reclining in meditation upon the back of the Waters, and the Tree (of Life) springs from his navel."

The references quoted above are sufficient to prove that there existed an ancient and continuous tradition of World Origin (*Genesis*) in which are involved the Waters, a Primordial Male, the Navel and a flowering Plant (the Tree of Life). The fact that the *Atharva-veda* passage just referred to described the Primeval Male from whom the Tree of Life originated as Yaksha appears to be of interest. Indologists are generally unanimous in holding that "the *Atharva-veda* contains many elements incorporated from the pre-existing aboriginal non-Aryan sources."⁵¹ The ascription of the primary procreative function to a Yaksha, therefore, appears to be due to the influence of non-Aryan ideas and beliefs on the incoming Aryans. It is also interesting to note that in the Bharhut reliefs the squatting males are depicted as pot-bellied (*tuṇḍīla*) which is a peculiarity of the Yakshas according to later iconographic texts.

From the above discussion it appears that the idea of the Yaksha, who was originally a popular god of the pre-vedic inhabitants of India and was intimately

⁴⁶ *Agni Purāṇa*, XLIX.

⁴⁷ *Ṛigveda*, X, 82. 5-6.

⁴⁸ *Yajurveda*, IV, 6. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ṛigveda*, I, 24.7—"Varuṇa, King, of hallowed might, sustaineth erect the Tree's stem in the baseless region".

⁵⁰ *Atharva-veda*, X, 7.38,—"*Mahad Yakshaḥ bhuvanasya Madhye tapasi krāntaḥ salilasya prishthe; Tasmin chhṛayante (śrayante) ya u ke cha devā vṛkshasya skandhaḥ parita iva śikhāḥ.*"

⁵¹ Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Part II (Reprint edn., 1971), p. 32.

connected with the Waters, being the source of all vegetative life is a very old Indian belief, which was accepted by the Vedic Aryans from their contact with the original peoples of the land. In the earlier Vedic texts⁵² the functions of the Yaksha was attributed to Varuṇa, then the greatest of the Vedic gods. With the decline of Varuṇa's position in the Vedic pantheon, the Yaksha's attributes were successively assumed by Viśvakarman, Puruṣa, Prajāpati, Brahman, and ultimately, by the cosmic god Nārāyaṇa (Vishṇu) who retains it to this day.

That the lotus rhizome has been allowed to come out of the navel points to the importance attached by popular imagination to this member of the body as a seat of the vital force (*prāṇa*). When, however, the plant is shown as coming out of the mouth of the Yaksha (Pl. XVII, *b*), it appears, as has been suggested by Coomaraswamy⁵³, that the mouth, being the seat of the main life-breath (*mukhya prāṇa*), may be considered as the source of the life-force; or more probably, that being full of saliva (*rasa*), has been regarded, like the *Pūrṇa-kumbha*, as full of the life-giving waters, and hence a source of the Tree of Life.

(5) *Pūrṇa-ghaṭa* (Pl. XVIII, *a*)—Full of water, which according to Vedic mythology, contains the germ of all creation, and with a flowering plant, symbolizing the act of creation in palpable reality, coming out of its mouth, the *Pūrṇa-ghaṭa*, "Vase of Plenty" or *Mangala-ghaṭa*, "Vase of Auspiciousness", as it is variously called, is one of the most typical symbols of the mysterious force that reveals itself in creation. It is also the "emblem *par excellence* of fulness and prosperity", and for this reason auspiciousness attaches to it.⁵⁴ Its ritual value and symbolism is so deep-rooted in the mind of the Indians even to-day that no religious ceremony can be performed in an Indian house without the installation of this "Auspicious Pot" (*Mahāgala-ghaṭa*). Being the container of water, it symbolizes water itself, and all the creative and effusive qualities supposed to reside in that primary element. This accounts for its forming a part in the iconography of Water Cosmology at Bharhut.

As a decorative motif the *Pūrṇa-ghaṭa* occurred in Indian art from very early times, and proliferated in various forms and modifications throughout the long history of that art. In the Bharhut Railing it occurs seven times; thrice singly (101, 215, 249; Pl. XVIII, *a*), where the device is shown as an ornamented globular pot from whose mouth comes out the branches of a plant bearing full-blown lotuses, both *padmas* and *utpalas*, and in some instances birds in the attitude of pecking are shown

⁵² *Rigveda*, I, 24, 7.

⁵³ Coomaraswamy, A. K. *Yakshas*, Part II, p. 24, fn. 1.

⁵⁴ The symbolism and significance of the *Pūrṇa-ghaṭa* has been expounded by many scholars. cf. Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Part II, pp. 61-64; Agrawala, V. S., "Pūrṇa Kumbha or 'the Full Vase'", *Roopa-Lekha*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, pp. 22-31; Agrawala, P. K., *The Pūrṇa Kalasa*, Varanasi, 1965.

seated on these flowers ; thrice with Lakshmi or Gaja-Lakshmi, seated or standing on lotus coming out of the pot (113, 177, 208 ; Pl. XVIII, *b, c*) ; and once as the border of a cross-bar lotus-medallion showing a meandering lotus rhizome issuing out of an inverted pot (90 ; XI, *b*).

Śrī-Lakshmi (Pls. XVIII, *b, c* ; XXIV, *d-f*)—Some of the full-medallions (73, 113, 177, 208) ; (Pl. XVIII, *b, c*), show a lady, either seated or standing, on a full-blown lotus. The lotus-seat (*padmāsana*) rises, not directly from the field of the medallion, but from a Vase of Plenty (*Pūrṇa-ghaṭa*) which represents the waters. A lotus springs from a spray, this also coming out of the Full Vase, on either side of the lady, and an elephant standing on each lotus pours water over her head from inverted jars held by the trunk. In 73, 177 and 208 (Pl. XVIII, *c*) the lady is seen touching, rather pressing, her breasts ; in 113 (Pl. XVIII, *b*) her hands are folded in the *añjali* pose. These figures, known as Gaja-Lakshmi or Abhisheka-Lakshmi, are a well known art motif ; and frequently occurs in early Indian coins and stone reliefs, e.g., coins of Azilises⁵⁵, Sanchi Stūpa I Gateway⁵⁶, Bodhgaya railing etc.

Some other reliefs on the chamfered edges of pillars also show a female standing on lotus and touching her breasts. There are others, also on the chamfered edges, which show a woman holding a lotus bud that hangs down from a stem emerging from the side of the half-medallion overhead (Pl. XXIX, *d*). Two other chamfer reliefs (Pl. XXIV, *e* and *f*) show the woman standing under a flowering lotus-plant (though the stem of the plant is like the trunk of a tree, there is no doubt that they represent the lotus-plant) holding a bough overhead in the *dohada* attitude (i.e., one leg encircling the trunk).

All these figures appear to represent some form of a goddess of Abundance whose primary associations are with the lotus and who, in the developed Indian pantheon, came to be known as Lakshmi, also called Śrī, the consort of Vishṇu and goddess *par excellence* of Abundance and Prosperity.

In the *Rigveda* both the words *śrī* and *lakshmi* denoted abstract qualities ; the former meant "that which is beautiful, that is, pleasing to the eye", the latter "auspicious", "pleasant". Śrī is first personified in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*,⁵⁷ where she appears as a heavenly woman. In the *Śrī Sūkta* Śrī and Lakshmi are one and the same goddess (hence forward till to-day the two words are synonymous), who is associated with the lotus, *padme sthitā*, "she who stands on the lotus". This association of Sri-Lakshmi with the lotus persists throughout her history from her first

⁵⁵Whitehead, R. B., *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore*, Vol. I (Oxford, 1914). Pl. XIII, No. 332.

⁵⁶Marshall, J., and Foucher, A., *The Monuments of Sanchi*, Vol. II (nd). Pls. XXV, XLI, XLV, LVI.

⁵⁷*Śatapatha Brāh.*, XI, 4, 3, 1.

appearance as a goddess to this day. In the Epics she appears as a concrete goddess of Fortune. Her special connection with Vishṇu (Nārāyaṇa) as the latter's consort (*śakti*) also begins in the Epics. According to Paurāṇik mythology, Śrī-Lakshmi was produced at the Churning of the Ocean (*samudramanthana*) by the gods and Asuras when she came out, last of all, with the flask of nectar (*amṛitabhāṇḍa*) in her hand. This legend clearly brings out her connection with the primordial waters and with the sap of life (*rasa=amṛita*). In medieval literature her conception as a goddess of Fortune persists. Her connection with the ocean, with lotus and elephant, all of which represent the primordial waters, the source of all creation, is clearly demonstrated in the "Kamale Kāminī" episode of the *Chandaṁmahāgala Kāvya* of medieval Bengal, which relates how Dhanapati Sadāgar on his voyage to Ceylon, saw a heavenly damsel, no other than Śrī-Lakshmi, seated on a lotus (*padmāsana*), lotus in hand (*padmahastā*), in a lotus forest (*kamalavana*, *kamalālayā*), alternately swallowing and vomiting a white elephant.

From the literary sources cited above, we see that Śrī-Lakshmi is a goddess of Water Cosmology. Her special associations are primarily with the lotus (*padma*) and secondarily with the elephant, both of which stand for the waters.

In the Bharhut reliefs Śrī-Lakshmi is associated with the lotus in three ways: (1) as *padmahastā*, "holding the lotus flower in hand" (Pl. XXIV, *d*). This, however, is not very distinctive, because, human beings, both male and female, also carries the lotus for pleasure (*līlāpadma*) and for worship (*arghya*). (2) as *padmāsana*, "seated on an expanded lotus". This is the case with all the representations of Gaja-Lakshmi (Pl. XVIII, *b, c*) at Bharhut. Moreover, in these representations she is also associated with the elephant, another element of her iconography. (3) as *padmavāsini* or *kamalālayā*, where she is surrounded by the flowering stems and leaves of the lotus plant, establishing her environment. The Gaja-Lakshmi figures referred to above and the chamfer reliefs on either side of pillar 23 (Pl. XXIV, *e, f*) appear to represent this aspect of the goddess. In the former case the lotus sprays, leaves and flowers on her either side and in the latter the flowering tree around which her leg is encircled and of which she holds a branch establish her environment and habitat.

In the Bharhut reliefs she is also seen pressing her breasts. This gesture indicates her power as a goddess of abundance (*lakshmi*) of pouring nourishment at will on one and all.

To sum up, originally a popular goddess of abundance and nourishment, associated with Water Cosmology (lotus, elephant), Śrī-Lakshmi absorbed in herself the personification of two abstract Vedic terms which implied the popular goddess's distinctive qualities. The iconographic type thus established persisted unchanged upto the present day.

Let us now consider the decoration around the medallions. The half and full medallions are balanced respectively by two and four stems of flowers or fruits, each emerging up or hanging down from the side of the medallions on the chamfered edge of the pillars. These stems often have figures of animals and birds perching on the flowers and fruits they carry, the birds generally being in the attitude of pecking. Some fine representations of the peacock (Pl. XXII, *b*), swan, and parrot, (Pl. XXII, *c*) are seen in these border decorations. Among the animals, the elephant (Pl. VIII, *c*) and the monkey (291) hold the lion's share; but there are also horses (Pl. VIII, *e*), and a fine representation of the squirrel (Pl. XXII, *d*) etc; and in one instance the fabulous winged horse *valāhaka aśva* (192). The ease and poise with which such a huge animal as the elephant has been accommodated on the small compass of the pericarp of a lotus flower deserve notice (Pl. VIII, *c*). The flowers that come out of the stems are generally the lotus, both *padma* and *utpala*; but there are also bunches of *Aśoka* (135) and *Śāla* (86), and other flowers; the fruits generally being the mango (*sahakāra*, Pl. XXII, *d*, right), jack-fruit (*panasa*, 135) and the rose-apple (*āra*, Pl. XXII, *d*, left).

Of greater interest than the animals and birds are the figures of men and women in different poses appearing on these border decorations. Most of these figures, both male and female, stand with the hands folded (*añjali*) in adoration, as if paying respect to the Stūpa, which symbolizes the august presence of the Buddha. In rare instances, as in 87 (Pl. XXII, *c*), each one of the couple stands on the head of a serpent⁸⁸ instead of the flowers.

(7) *Bhañjikā* and *Dohada* motifs (Pls. XXIII, *b*; XXIV, *a, b, e, f*). Some of these women are shown in the act of bending the twig of a blossoming tree, either *Śāla* (Pl. XXIII, *b*, right), or *Aśoka* (Pl. XXIII, *b* left; Pl. XXIV, *b*), or mango (Pl. XXIV, *a*). Others hold a bunch of some flowers in their hands,

V. S. Agrawala thinks that these represent some of the *udyānakṛdās* referred to in Indian literature.⁸⁹ Majumdar, in the same vein, writes, "The poses are evidently taken by the artists from games (*kṛdās*) known as *Śālabhañjikā* ("breaking the branch of a *Śāla* tree"), *Sahakāra-bhañjikā* ("plucking the mango fruit"), *Pushpāvachāyikā* ("plucking flowers"), *Uddālaka-pushpabhañjikā* ("plucking *Uddālaka* flowers"), some of which are referred to in the *Kāmasūtra*" (Benares, 1929, pp. 48-49).⁹⁰

We are, however, of the opinion that the *Bhañjikā* ("bending the branches of a tree") motif is the expression of a very old and continuous popular tradition of the

⁸⁸The male figure standing on the serpent's hood reminds us of the representations of the episode of subduing the *Kāliya Nāga* (*Kāliyadamana*) by *Krishṇa* in later art, while the female on the other side accords well with the *Viśvavarmottara* (iii, 65, 2-8) description of *Ananta Nāga* with the beautiful Earth Goddess standing on the central hood.

⁸⁹Agrawala, V. S., *Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, p. 139.

⁹⁰Majumdar, N. G., *Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum*, Part I (1937), p. 20.

association of women with trees. It has found a place in the arts of sculpture and literature as the intrinsic beauty and pregnant symbology of the motif have appealed to the Indian artists in various media throughout the ages. "There is no motif more fundamentally characteristic of Indian art from the first to the last than that of the Woman and Tree."⁶¹

The underlying idea of the motif becomes apparent when we consider it as an element of Water Cosmology. The tree is the Tree of Life; and the female figure represents the life-force that resides in it. The female figure may, therefore, be designated as a dryad (*vrīkshakā*); and so, she is a deity of fertility and prosperity. (Cf. the Epic passage "goddesses born in trees, to be worshipped by those desiring children."). On the Bharhut Railing these female figures are shown as voluptuous beauties, always wearing a jewelled girdle (*mekhalā*) which, according to the *Atharvaveda* (VI, 133), was a long-life (*āyushyu*) charm. They are, in reality, no other than Yakshis who are also considered as sylvan deities.

From this Yakshī-dryad (Woman and Tree) type are derived two allied motifs which are fundamentally the same, but differently interpreted. One is the *Bhañjika* ("bending the branches of tree") motif we are now discussing, the other the *Dohada* motif to be discussed presently.

It is interesting to note in this connection that the representation of the episode of the Buddha's Birth in the sculptural art of later times was derived from the *Śalabhañjika* motif. In these representations Māyādevī stands holding the branch of the tree which "bending down in response to her needs", served as her support. Here the Buddha's mother is not certainly to be considered as a *vrīkshakā*, but iconographically "the step is very easy from a *vrīkshakā* holding the branch of a tree in the *hanche* ('hip-shot') pose to that of Mahāmāyā giving birth to the child, who was miraculously born from her left side."⁶²

The word *dohada* means a "pregnancy longing", that is, the desire of a pregnant woman to get or have some particular thing. It is thought that unless this desire is satisfied the child will not properly develop, mentally or physically, while in the mother's womb, and when delivered and grown up will be defective in some respects. A ceremony (*sādhabhakṣhaṇa*) is, therefore, performed in an Indian house in the fifth month of the pregnancy of a woman when decked with new apparel and ornaments she is made to partake delicious preparations with the five condiments (*pañcāmṛita*) which include milk, curds, *ghee*, honey and sugar. It is supposed that the performance of this ceremony (*dohada-dāna*) will satisfy all the pregnancy desires of the woman and the future child will be perfect in all respects.

⁶¹Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Part I, (Reprint Edn., New Delhi, 1971), p. 32.

⁶²Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Part I, (Reprint Edn., New Delhi, 1971), pp. 34-35.

The idea underlying the *dohada* motif is that the tree, like a pregnant woman feels a longing for the touch of a youthful woman and until this desire is fulfilled its flowers cannot open. Many are the references to this motif in Indian literature throughout the ages. In Kālidasa's *Meghadūta*⁶³ the exiled Yaksha speaks of how the *Aśoka*-tree longed for the touch of his wife's feet as he himself longed for the same. In the same poet's *Mālavikāgnimitra*⁶⁴ reference is made to a ceremony of "Kicking the *Aśoka* tree" in which the heroine *Mālavikā* took the leading part. Even in the folk tales of Bengal we find reference to this motif; for example, the story of Sukhu and Dukhu in *Thākurmār Jhuli*, where a banana and a *Seorā* tree in turn asked the step sisters Dukhu and Sukhu to cleanse them of the pests and parasites which had infested them. Dukhu tendered the required service and was rewarded by the trees in turn. Sukhu refused to comply and the trees were unkind to her. It is interesting to note that the Tree and Woman motif found its way even in a story of Hans Anderson, the great European story-teller for children in modern times, where the young mother who had been robbed of her child's life by Death, while pursuing the latter had to embrace a snow-bitten thorny tree to make it burst into blossoms, and in return the tree helped her by telling the way Death had taken.

It will be apparent from the above references that the "Woman and Tree" is a widely prevalent literary motif both in time and space. As preserved in folk memory it embodies the idea that a young woman possesses some productive force in her person which she imparts to the tree when she touches it. But when considered in terms of Water Cosmology the process appears to be just the reverse. The tree being born of the life-giving waters is the Tree of Life, and the woman represents the reproductive force that resides as sap (*rasa*) in the tree. The relation of both the tree and the woman with the primeval waters, the source of all life, thus makes them symbols of fertility and prosperity.

As represented in the Bharhut Railing it is not always possible to identify a *Bhañjikā* figure from that of a *Dohada*. When the woman stands under the tree holding one of its boughs or touching a fruit or flower thereof, she may be considered as representing the *Bhañjikā* motif (Pl. XXIII, *b* and *c*, left; Pl. XXIV, *a*); but when over and above this, one of her legs is entwined with the tree-trunk she may be taken to represent the *Dohada* (Pl. XXIV, *b*, *e*, *f*). If this is taken to be the criterion, almost all the life-size female figures (*cf.* *Chūlakokā Devatā*, *Chandra Yakshi* etc.) on the Railing have to be considered as *Dohadas*. But originally there appears to be no such difference, and the charming beauties of the Bharhut artists were perhaps nothing more than *Yakshi-dryads* (*yīkshakās*), deities belonging to Water Cosmology. In later times poets and popular mind developed upon the theme which then proliferated into the

⁶³ *Meghadūta*, Stanza, 75.

⁶⁴ *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act, III.

udyana-kriḍā and *dohada* motifs. Far from the Bharhut artists taking their cue from the literary sources, it appears that later literature borrowed and developed upon an idea they found immortalized on stone at Bharhut, and many other places, viz., Sanchi, Amaravati, Mathura etc.

(8) Nāga—Medallion 81 (Pl. XVII, c) shows a Nāga accompanied by two Nāgis, one on either side, each holding a *chawri* in her hand. This, no doubt, represents a Nāgarāja and his wives. The Nāga king has been shown as standing in the human form, his serpentine affiliation being indicated by a canopy of five-headed snake-hood over his head. The Nāgis, on the other hand, have been shown in the hybrid form in which the head and bust upto the navel are those of a woman, while the lower limbs consist of the coils of an actual serpent.

Ophiolatry, that is, the worship of the Serpent as a deity, is a very old popular cult in India. The *Grihyasūtras* contain an account of the *Sarpavali*, an annual rite which takes the four months of the rainy season, from the full-moon of Śrāvaṇa (August-September) to the full-moon of Mārgaśīrṣa (November-December), its purpose being two-fold, namely, "honouring and warding off snakes". The worship of the Serpent deity is in vogue in India even to-day. "The custom of worshipping the Aṣṭanāgas (Vāsuki, Takshaka, Śeṣha, Ananta and others) and the Snake-goddess Manasā during the rains and specially on the Nāga Pañchamī day (usually falling in the month of Śrāvaṇa) even now current in Bengal, seems to be the popular counterpart of the Sarpavali of the *Grihyasūtras*".⁶⁵

The serpent that is worshipped as a deity is called the Nāga. It is not the snake in general; but the hooded cobra (*Naja tripudians*), raised to the rank of a divine being. In the legends the Nāga sometimes appears as a mere animal, sometimes as a human creature, but generally in him the human and animal qualities are peculiarly blended. This is also the case with the representations of the Nāga in Indian art, where we can distinguish three main iconographic types: (1) the form of an actual serpent with coils and a polycephalous hood (cf. illustration of the *maṇikaṇṭha-jātaka* on a Bharhut Coping, Cunningham, *Stūpa of Bharhut*, Pl. XLII. 1), (2) the human form always characterized by a polycephalous snake-hood over the head (cf. the Nāgarāja in medallion 81, Pl. XVII, c), and (3) a combination of the two where the head and bust of a human body is added to the lower half of a snake's coil (cf. the two Nāgis in medallion 81, Pl. XVII, c).

Numerous are the references to divine serpents in the mythology and folklore of India, the earliest being that of Ahi Budhnya in the *Ṛigveda*. Ahi Budhnya, "the Serpent of the Deep", appears to be an atmospheric deity, possibly representing the beneficial aspects of the clouds of heaven; however, like the snakes, he has something hurtful

⁶⁵Banerjea, J. N., *Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd Edn., 1956, p. 346.

about him, and is worshipped so as not to give his votaries up to injury. The fact that the clouds of heaven have been conceived as a serpent is of interest, as it appears to us to be the earliest Indian reference to the Nāga's connection with the element of water and of its power of bestowing and withholding the rains. The *Atharvaveda* refers to various snake-gods by name, for example, Pṛiḍāku, Tiraschirāji, Kalmāsagriva, etc. ; and in one passage, to Takshaka, described as a descendant of Viśāla (or Viśālā) (*Takshako Vaiśāleya*), who is better known from his exploits in the Great Epic.

The *Mahābhārata* is particularly rich in myths and sagas relating to the Nāgas. They are called the *Kādraveya*, being the offsprings of Kadrū ("the Tawny One"), who is a personification of the Earth. The sagas in which the Nāgas feature most prominently in the Great Epic are those which describe the performance of the "Sarpasatra" (Snake-Sacrifice) by King Janamejaya⁶⁶ and the Wager of Kadrū and Vinatā with its sequel of Rape of Amṛita (*Amṛitaharaṇa*) by Garuḍa⁶⁷. On more than one occasion the Great Epic furnishes us with lists of Nāgarājas, one of them giving seventy-eight⁶⁸ and another sixty-eight⁶⁹ names. Even then, the narrator, Sauti, declares that these are only the principal Nāgas, as owing to their enormous number it would be impossible to name them all.

The Buddhist literature also contains much of serpent lore. In the legends relating to the previous births of the Buddha (*i.e.*, *Jātakas*) as well as in his existence as Śākyamuni, the Nāgas play a prominent part. In his previous births, the Bodhisattva was no less than three times born as a Nāga⁷⁰ and in the episodes of his last mundane existence there are no less than a dozen and a half in which one or more Nāga appear as *dramatis personae*. In these legends they are generally represented as his worshippers—some no doubt had to be subdued by his divine effulgence—or in some way getting themselves gratified by rendering service to the great Master.

In the *Kṛishṇāyana* legends (that is, the stories relating to the life of Kṛishṇa and his associates) also the Nāgas are found to be present, *e.g.*, Kṛishṇa's triumph over Nāga Kālīya⁷¹ and Balarāma's apotheosis⁷², where he is described as an incarnation of Ananta Nāga. As a matter of fact throughout Indian literature and folklore the Nāgas feature more prominently than any other popular deity.

On the Bharhut Railing the Nāgas appear on several reliefs in connection with the portrayal of scenes from the Buddha's life. Thus, one of the panels in the Prasenejit pillar, as appears from the inscribed label, depicts the Nāga king Elāpatra's

⁶⁶ *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparvan, chaps. xlix-lviii.

⁶⁷ *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparvan, chaps. xx-xxiii, and xxv-xxxiv.

⁶⁸ *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparvan, chapt. xxx, vv. 5-16.

⁶⁹ *Mahābhārata*, Udyogaparvan, chapt. ciii, vv. 9-16.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Sankhapāla-Jātaka* (No. 524), *Champeyya-Jātaka* (No. 506), and *Bhūridatta-Jātaka* (No. 543).

⁷¹ Cf. *Harivamśa*, vv. 3592-3702.

⁷² Cf. *Mahābhārata*, Maushalaparvan, chapt. iv.

visit to the Buddha. The relief on medallion 81, however, is not labelled; and so, it appears to constitute an item of the general decorative scheme, forming an element of the iconography of Water Cosmology.

The conspicuous feature of Indian serpent lore is the Nāga's association with the waters. In many a legend the Nāga is said to haunt lakes, and ponds and rivers; they are also beneficial givers of rain. This led Kern to propound that the Nāgas are essentially water-spirits.

Even in the *Ṛigveda*⁷³ Ahi Budhnya, who is an atmospheric deity, is conceived as a "serpent born in water (*abjām*), sitting at the bottom (*budhne*) of the streams in the space", (*i.e.* the clouds). The connection of the Nāgas with the ocean, the primary source of water, is clearly brought out in the epic legends. In the *Mahābhārata* the ocean is described as the "Abode of the Nāgas" (*nāgānām ālayam*⁷⁴) and Bhogavati, the capital of the Nāgas, is beneath the waters. Again, Śeṣha or Ananta, is conceived as the World Serpent, who, lying in the ocean, carries the sea-girdled Earth on his head encompassing her with its endless coils.⁷⁵ Besides carrying the earth Ananta is assigned another duty which also testifies to his oceanic connections. According to epic and paurāṇik cosmogonic theories, the universe (cosmos) is periodically created and re-absorbed by the deity. A period of creative action is followed by an interval of divine rest, when the Supreme Deity (Viṣṇu as the cosmic god Nārāyaṇa) is supposed to sleep on the coils of the World Serpent Ananta in the midst of the waves of the ocean. At last Brahmā, the Creator, was born from a lotus growing out of Viṣṇu's navel and the Supreme Deity awakes to renewed action.

Baladeva, the elder brother of Kṛiṣṇa, is believed to be an incarnation of Ananta. His identity with the World Serpent is picturesquely described in the account of his death after the destruction of the Yādava race⁷⁶. The text describes how "Kṛiṣṇa found his elder brother seated alone by the sea-side in solitude engaged in *yoga*. Then from his mouth there issued forth a thousand-headed, red-mouthed, large white Nāga, who leaving his body, sped towards the great ocean. There Sāgara (the ocean) received him, and so did the divine Nāgas—Kārkoṭaka, Vāsuki, Takshaka, Dhṛitarāṣṭra and a host of others". From this legend it is very clear that the World Serpent Ananta originally belonged to the ocean. From there his divinity made a sojourn on the mortal person of a scion of Yadu's race. When the earthly career of the man on whom the deity was pleased to descend came to an end, the divinity returned to his original habitat which was the ocean. Ananta's aquatic associations require no further elucidation. Not only Ananta, but all the other great Nāgarāja's, Vāsuki, Kārkoṭaka, Takshaka, etc., are said to belong to the ocean.

⁷³ *Ṛigveda*, VII, 34, 16; X, 93, 5.

⁷⁴ *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparvan, chaps. xxi, v. 6 and xxv, v. 4.

⁷⁵ *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparvan, chapt. xxxvi.

⁷⁶ *Mahābhārata*, Maushalaparvan, chapt. iv, vv. 13-17.

Again, in the legend of Kṛishṇa's subduing the Kāliya Nāga,⁷⁷ it is stated that the original home of the Nāga was in the ocean, which he had given up for fear of Garuḍa, and taken refuge in a pool of the Yamunā near Gokula. When subdued, he was ordained by Kṛishṇa to return to the ocean. Kāliya's associations with the waters is thus testified.

The aquatic affiliation of the Nāgas is also demonstrated in the Buddhist tradition, according to which both Varuṇa and Sāgara, really gods of the oceans, have been converted into Nāgarājas. The Jātakas mention two types of Nāgas, viz., those who "dwell in the sea" (*samuddatthaka nāgabavana*) and those who "dwell in the mountains" (*pabbatatthaka nāgabavana*).⁷⁸ However, mountains are rarely found to be haunted by the Nāgas, while the ocean, lakes, rivers and pools are very commonly found to be inhabited by these divine reptiles. In the first chapter of the *Bhūridatta-Jātaka*, the Nāga mother is made to say to her royal husband, "My children are of a watery nature (*udakavijaka*)". Water in reality is the element of the Nāgas.

According to the *Lalitavistara*, the river Nairāṇjanā, near Uruvilva (Bodhgaya), was known as the "River of the Nāgas". Many of the Nāgarājas who are made to visit and pay homage to the Buddha had their haunts in the waters. Thus, according to tradition recorded by Hiuen Tsang, Apalāla was the Nāga of the fountain at the source of the Suvāstu (Swat) river,⁷⁹ and in the *Mahāvastu* it is stated that Elāpatra had his abode in a tank near Takṣaśilā.⁸⁰

The Nāgas were also supposed to possess the power of producing or withholding rain. According to the testimony of Hiuen Tsang, Nāga Apalāla possessed this power, and thanks to his good offices the country of Suvāstu was not afflicted by violent storms and rains. The best evidence of the Nāgas' powers in this respect is to be found in a legend preserved in the Tibetan Life of the Buddha, which speaks of two Nāgarājas, Girika and Vidyujvālaka, banished from Rājagṛiha by King Bimbisāra. As a result, rain stopped, crops failed and the country was afflicted with famine. It was only when the two Nāgas had been brought back from banishment that the rains became regular and the shadow of famine was lifted from the country.

It is also to be noted that the annual Sarpavali rite is prescribed in the *Gṛīhyasūtras* to be held during the rains. This is the time of the year when the danger from the snakes is the greatest, as during this period, driven out of their holes by water, they take refuge in the dwellings of men. This fact will help us to understand the relationship that popular mind has established between the snakes and water. From the observation that the snakes regularly make their appearance at the commencement of the rains the primitive mind concluded that the advent of the rains was due to the magical powers of these dreaded reptiles. In a hot country like India water is the

⁷⁷ *Harivaṃśa*, vv. 3592-3702.

⁷⁸ Fausball, *Jātakas*, Vol. VI, p. 158, 194.

⁷⁹ Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol. I, p. 228.

⁸⁰ *Mahāvastu*, Vol. III, p. 327f.

most essential element for vegetative growth and consequent existence and prosperity of the human society. The connection that the popular mind had established by observation between the snakes and water appears to account for the great prevalence of Nāga worship in India.

From the above exposition it will be apparent that from very early times there existed a continuous tradition of a connection between the Nāgas and the waters. This accounts for their forming an element in the iconography of Water Cosmology on the Railing around the Bharhut Stūpa.

(9) Mithuna—Pillar medallion 99 (Pl. XVII, d) shows a man and a woman standing side by side, the woman to the left of the man. In the *Śilpasastras* such couples are known as *Mithunas*. These occur as a decorative motif in Indian art throughout the ages, those on the temples of Khajuraho and Konarak being world-famous for their exquisite beauty and lyrical loveliness. Hundreds of terracotta plaques, many of them belonging to the Suṅga period, the time when the Bharhut Railing was erected, have been found at the excavations of the early historical sites of northern India, e.g., Taxila, Bhita, Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, Kumrahar, etc. Most of these plaques are characterized by a perforation at the top, which indicates that they were hung on the walls of houses as interior decoration. This indicates the great popularity of the Mithuna as an element of decorative art in India; and this popularity was due not only to its intrinsic beauty, but also to its auspicious symbology.⁸¹

Auspiciousness attaches to the Mithuna as it is considered to be a symbol of fecundity. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁸², *Mitnuna* means a reproductive couple, that is a man and a woman (or a male and a female of any species of animal)⁸³ in the prime of their youth, capable of performing the sexual act (*maithuna*) fruitfully with a view to reproduction. It is auspicious as it performs a very important function to the society, namely, the continuation and perpetuation of the species through the ages.

The following passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁸⁴ is significant. "From Prajāpati, when dismembered, couples (*mithunāni*) went forth;.....birth originates from a Mithuna." Again the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*⁸⁵ says, "Prajāpati did not feel happy or satisfied by himself; therefore, even now people are not happy in single

⁸¹Even in modern times it is found that the purpose of the illustrated calendars hung on the walls of houses is not only to consult the dates, but also to serve as mural decoration; and it will be found that in many cases the subjects portrayed on these calendars are religious in nature depicting such popular gods and goddesses as Lakshmi, Sarasvatī, Kālī, Durgā, Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the exploits of Kṛishṇa. This indicates that the popular mind is most influenced by those artistic representations that have come to them through the medium of religion.

⁸²*Śatapatha Brāh.*, X, 5, 2, 8.

⁸³Cf. *Mina-mithuna*, *Krauñcha-mithuna*, *Gandharva-mithuna*, *Kinnara-mithuna*, *Nāga-mithuna*, all of which are considered as auspicious symbols.

⁸⁴*Śatapatha Brāh.*, IX, 4, 1, 2-5.

⁸⁵*Bṛihadāraṇyaka Up.*, IV, 40, 3.



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blessedness. He (Prajāpati) craved for a second to himself. He divided his own body into two parts, and in consequence there appeared two figures—a man and a woman. Thus the void, the emptiness, was filled complemented by women. Prajāpati merged himself in that woman in sexual act; and from that act sprang the human beings.”

Mention may be made in this connection to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya Sāhita*, both of which inform us that Prajāpati assumed the forms of fish (*matsya*), tortoise (*kaśyapa*=*kūrma*), and boar (*varāha*) “on different occasions for the furtherance of creation and the well-being of the created.”⁸⁶ That the Tortoise (*Kaśyapa*) is regarded as a great progenitor of the human race (*Prajāpati*) appears to be confirmed from the great number of men in India who declare themselves to belong to the *Kaśyapa* (Tortoise) *gotra*. It should be noted that the Mithuna couple in medallion 99 stands (each of them placing one leg) on an eminence which resembles the back of a tortoise. This may represent the primordial mountain, the ultimate source of all life, beneath the bottom of the cosmic ocean, referred to in early Aryan mythology⁸⁷, or more probably, it may stand for Prajāpati himself in the form of the Tortoise (*Kaśyapa*), from whom the original Mithuna is supposed to originate. In either case, the connection of the Mithuna with Water Cosmology is established by the Bharhut artists.

ANIMAL STYLE

Both natural and fabulous animals are depicted on the Bharhut Railing. Of the former category we find many species of quadrupeds, several kinds of birds, snakes, crocodile, tortoise (Pl. XX, *b*), lizard, fish (Pl. XIX, *b*), crab and frog. Not all occur in the decorative reliefs alone, some are found as *vāhana* of the life-size figures and some on the story-telling reliefs. The quadrupeds include the lion (Pl. IV, *c*), elephant (Pls. IV, *a, b*; XI, *d*; XX, *d*), horse (Pl. XXI, *d*), wild boar (Pl. XXI, *c*), bull (Pl. V, *d*), bullock (Pl. XX, *c*), deer (Pl. XXI, *b*), antelope (Pl. V, *c*), jackal (Pl. VI, *b*), monkey (Pl. XX, *d*), ram (Pl. XXI, *a*), cat (Pl. VI, *a*), dog (Pl. XXI, *c*), rhinoceros, hare and squirrel (Pl. XXII, *d*). Amongst the birds are the peacock (Pls. XIX, *d*; XXII, *b*), cock (Pl. VI, *a*), parrot (Pl. XXII, *c*), swan (Pls. XI, *a*; XVIII, *a*; XV, *d*), duck or goose; crow and the quail.

The representations of all these animals are recognizably, if not anatomically, correct; and some of them are quite natural and sometimes even spirited. The Bharhut artists have been the most successful in the delineation of monkeys and elephants whose poses and attitudes have been depicted with perfect naturalness, and in some cases with a warmth of charm that generates only from love for these animals (Pl. XX, *d*). On the other hand, they have been very unsuccessful in the depiction of the horse. A comparison of the horse on the abacus of the Sarnath Lion Capital with that on Bharhut half-medallion No. 244 (Pl. XXI, *d*) will bring out the

⁸⁶Banerjea, J. N., *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (2nd Edn.), p. 389.

⁸⁷*Cf. ante*, p. 35.

difference ; in some cases it is difficult to recognize a horse from a donkey.

The peacocks depicted on a cross-bar medallion (Pl. XIX, *d*) deserve special mention. The central peacock with its head-plumes (*śikhī*) and spread-out fan-tail, almost covering the whole field, has been very naturally and spiritedly depicted ; two other peacocks, one on either side of the central one, are shown in the pecking posture.

(2) Fabulous Animals (*Ihā-mṛigas*)—Fabulous animals, like the winged lion (*sapaksha-siṃha*) (Pl. XI, *c*), the winged horse (*balāhaka-aśva*) (Pl. XVI, *b*), and the griffin (*śyeṇa-vyāḷa*), are known in Indian mythology from very early times. These are composite or hybrid types, being a curious blend of the lion, the bull, the horse and the bird ; occasionally, human heads are engrafted on such animal bodies (Pl. V, *a, b*) and sometimes wings are also added on to them (Pl. XVI, *b*). In later iconographic texts these hybrid creatures are designated as *Ihā-mṛigas*, which may be translated as "fantastic animals". These fantastic animals mainly occur in the semicircular panels on the inner face of the coping and on the horizontal borders along the diameters of the half-medallions.

Thus, panel 325 (Pl. IV, *d*) shows a composite quadruped having a leonine body, bird's head with asinine ears, horse-like mane over the nape of the neck and lion's tail ; its forelegs have cloven hoofs like a bovine, while the hind legs have clawed paws like a feline. Panel 345 (Pl. V, *b*) shows a bearded human-faced bull. This reminds us of the large human-faced bulls on either side of the gates of the Assyrian palaces at Nineveh and Dur Sharrukin (c. 8th century B. C.). It should, however, be noted that the Assyrian bulls are winged, while the Bharhut specimen lacks the flying appendages. Panel 354 (Pl. V, *a*) shows a human-faced lion without mane. The quadruple animal capitals over the square abacus of the Torāṇa pillars as well as the middle Torāṇa architrave also show some of these fantastic animals (*Ihā-mṛigas*) (Pl. I), e.g., human-faced lions with manes over the head and neck on the inner face of the northern pillar and on the extreme right of the middle architrave (inner face) ; and bird-faced lions on the same face of the southern pillar and on the extreme left of the same architrave.

Animals having a lion's body and the head of some other animals or of birds persisted as a decorative motif in Indian architecture, particularly on the walls of temples, till very late period. These composite animals are known in Indian iconographic texts as *vyāḷas* (Oḍḍiyā *viḷāla*). There are *gaja-vyāḷas*, *nara-vyāḷas*, *śuka-vyāḷas*, *śyeṇa-vyāḷas*, etc. The leonine animals of the Bharhut Railing having bird's and human faces may be described respectively as *śyeṇa-vyāḷas* (Pl. IV, *d*) and *nara-vyāḷas*, (Pl. V, *a*), and they appear to be the prototypes of similar chimerical creatures shown on the early medieval temples of India.

These fantastic creatures can be traced in the proto-historic art of the Indus Valley. But they may be more directly attributed to contact with Western Asia in the period immediately preceding and succeeding the Christian era. Thus, the bearded human-faced bulls, as we have said, point to Assyrian forebearers, while the human-

faced lions point to the Egyptian sphinxes. Along with these fantastic creatures, some other patterns, viz., the stepped merlons, the palmette and the so-called "honey-suckle", appear to have entered the domain of Indian art during this period through contact with the then Western World.

Some other fabulous animals, mostly aquatic, are also shown on the Railing. They are shown either singly or as *vāhanas* to the life-size figures. Their association with the waters and with vegetation is either explicit or implied, and so, they appear to form part of the iconography of Water Cosmology, already referred to.

The most important of these fabulous aquatic animals is the mythical sea-monster Makara (Pl. XIX, *a, b, c*), sometimes confounded with the crocodile (*nakra*) or the whale (*timī*). In later Indian iconography it is shown as the mount (*vāhana*) of the river-goddess Gaṅgā, and sometimes also as that of Varuṇa, the god presiding over the waters. It is also regarded as the emblem (*lāñchhana*) of Kāmadeva, the god of love. In later Indian sculpture it is shown as a hybrid creature having the body of a crocodile and the trunk of an elephant.

Of the several representations of this mythical monster on the Bharhut Railing, three (Pl. XIX, *a, b, c*), are on two cross-bars and one on a pillar half-medallion (224). The monster is represented as having a scalp resembling that of an elephant to which a long crocodilian snout with parted jaws set with peg-like crocodile teeth has been engrafted. Its sternum and forelegs resemble those of an elephant (224) or a bull (Pl. XIX, *a, b, c*); the rest of the body resembling that of a fish or a sea-reptile, furnished with fish-like side and tail fins. In one representation the body is covered with scales (Pl. XIX, *a*), in the others it is shown plain and smooth (Pl. XIX *b, c*). In 84 (Pl. XIX, *a*) and 224 the body is curled into coils like that of a serpent, while in 137 and 146 (Pl. XIX, *b, c*), it is curbed upwards but not coiled. The upper jaw is curbed upwards to form an incipient proboscis, but not the long trunk of an elephant. In 137 (Pl. XIX, *c*) a lotus plant with two full-blown lotuses and a bud is shown issuing out of the animal's mouth, while in 146 (Pl. XIX, *b*) the animal possesses tendril-like piscine feelers on its upper snout and three fishes are shown around its head, one of them being between its gaping jaws, as if being swallowed by the monster.

As a great leviathan moving in the waters, and as *vāhanas* of a god (Varuṇa) and a goddess (Gaṅgā), both of whom preside over the waters, the Makara's aquatic associations is explicit. But what is more important to note from our point of view is not its association with water, but that it symbolizes water itself, which according to the ideas of Water Cosmology, is the source of all life. This explains the Makara's appearance on the Railing and also why it has been shown as the source of the lotus vegetation in 137 (Pl. XIX, *c*), which at Bharhut stands for the Tree of Life.

We now come to consider what the animals shown on the volute ends of the Torapa stand for. Are they Makaras or ordinary crocodiles? These animals resemble the other Makaras depicted on the Railing with only one singular difference, namely that all the Makaras at Bharhut possess a fish-like end-fin on the tip of the tail,

whereas these monsters have no such fin on their tails which gradually taper to a point like the ordinary crocodiles. We, therefore, adhere to Barua's opinion that these animals are in reality crocodiles and stand for Māra, the embodiment of Evil according to Buddhist mythology.

Of other fantastic animals depicted on the Railing mention may be made of a group of mythological creatures who are terrestrial as to head and shoulders and aquatic in body and tail. These are the water-horse, *jala-turaga* (106 as *vāhana* of Chandrā Yakshi) (Pl. VIII, *d*); the water-elephant, *jala-karī* or *jalebha* (218 as a band of border to the upper half-medallion) (Pl. XXI, *c*); the water-bull, *jala-vṛishabha* (92) (Pl. XXI, *a*); and the sea-lion, *sindhu-siṃha* (306 as *vāhana* of darpaṇā) (Pl. VIII, *b*). Two mutilated animals of the merman type, *matsyanara* (2 and 214), are also shown as *vāhanas* respectively of an unidentified demi-god (Pl. VIII, *a*) and of Ajakālaka Yaksha. The former (Pl. VIII, *a*) has a partially damaged bearded human face; the other (214) is completely defaced, but the human hands inserted into the mouth in the attitude of whistling indicate that the face was that of a man. All these animals have coiled serpentine bodies and tails, the latter furnished with fish-like end fins like the Makaras depicted on the Railing. Aquatic in affiliation, all these hybrid creatures, like the Makaras already referred to, no doubt symbolize the waters. The import of the association of these mythical water monsters with the Yakshas and Yakshis and other demi-gods and demi-goddesses whose mount they happen to be thus becomes clear. The Yakshas and Yakshis are mainly water divinities and as water is the primal giver of life, only secondarily and by implication are they those of fertility and prosperity.

Thus far we have seen that the Makara and cognate type of animals represent the waters which is the *raison d'être* for their occurrence as the source of the lotus plant (Tree of Life) and also for being the *vāhanas* of the Yaksha type of demi-gods present on the Railing. We have now to see if the same is applicable to the elephants from whose mouth the *kalpavalli* originates on the Coping. These elephants are shown as ordinary terrestrial elephants, and not as *jalebhas*. The connection of the elephant with the waters becomes apparent from the Paurāṇik legend of the Churning of the Ocean (*Samudramanthana*) according to which the white elephant Airāvata, along with the horse Uchchaiśravā, came out of the ocean due to churning by the Devas and Asuras, and was appropriated by Indra. It should also be noted that the *kalpavalli* is a celestial plant, and so the celestial waters in the form of clouds may be considered as its source and the clouds are thought to be atmospheric elephants (*kuṇḍjara*).

GEOMETRIC STYLE

Motifs that may be considered as belonging to the Geometric Style are sparingly used in the decoration of the Railing. Of these the following deserve mention.

- (1) **Chevrons**—In some of the cross-bars (120, 165) a circle of hatched

chevrons is found to form the outer border to the lotus-medallions (Pl. XIII, c, d). They appear to be simply decorative in purpose.

(2) Svastika—Pillar medallion No. 168 shows a linear decoration which consists of a number of interconnected *svastikas* and *sauvastikas*,⁸⁸ the spaces between the arms of the signs being filled with lines of beads or *ratnamālās* (Pl. XVI, c). The *svastika* is a sign of great antiquity. It is found on many of the painted pottery of the Harappan culture, and also on the antiquities belonging to the early cultures of Europe and the Near East. Being a very simple sign consisting of a number of straight lines, easy to draw and easy to remember, the *svastika* has a great vogue both in time and space. Many theories have been presented by scholars concerning its symbolism. It has respectively been thought to represent Zeus, the sun, the fire, the god Indra the rain-maker, the earth, the sky, the four quarters, the union of the sexes; and finally, the Deity of all Deities, the great god, the maker of all the Universe. Some scholars have attributed a phallic significance to it; while others have recognized in it the generative principle that resides in the female making it a symbol for such great Mother goddesses as Artemis, Hera, Demeter, Astarte, etc. So great divergence of opinion about its interpretation indicates that its origin and significance have been lost in its great antiquity. What seems to have been at all times an attribute of the *svastika* is its character as a charm or amulet for good fortune and good luck, and also as a sign of benediction and blessing. The Sanskrit name for the sign, *svastika*, has been derived from *su*, "Well", "good" + *asti*, "it is", "let there be". Thus the name for the sign indicates that it is thought mainly to stand for auspiciousness. This character of the symbol has persisted into modern times; but for which reason auspiciousness attaches to it is now lost to us. It is still used by the people of India, irrespective of their sectarian affiliation, and also by those of China and Japan as a sign of good wishes and good fortune, and also for abundance, prosperity and long life.⁸⁹

It should, however, be borne in mind that whatever might have been the significance of the sign to those who used it and in whatever way modern scholars might have interpreted it, the *svastika* had always remained a design for ornamentation, and the Bharhut artists appear to have used it not only for its religious and auspicious significance, but also for its ornamental value.

(3) Tetraskelion—Medallion No. 150 (Pl. XVI, d) bears a curious decoration which is a blend of the Plant and Geometric Styles. The whole field of the medallion

⁸⁸The *svastika* and the *sauvastika* consist of two straight lines crossing each other at right angles. The bars of the normal *svastika* and *sauvastika* are straight, of equal thickness throughout, and cross each other at right angles, making four arms of equal size, length and style. Their peculiarity is that all the ends of the lines are extended at right angles and in the same direction, either to the right or to the left. The one that has the arms extended to the right is generally called the *svastika*; the other, having those extended to the left, the *sauvastika*. In common parlance, however, both the varieties are sometimes called the *svastika* without discrimination. In these pages we have also used the term *svastika* to designate either variety of the sign.

⁸⁹Cf. Wilson, Thomas, *The Svastika*, (Delhi, 1973), for a detailed discussion of the *Svastika* symbol.

is divided into a number of squares by flat bands of straight lines, three of them running horizontally and three others vertically. Each square thus formed contains two half-lotuses inside half-medallions. These half-medallions are posited in such a way that their circumferences touch each other at the highest point of the semi-circle, and their diameters are formed by two of the opposite sides of the square in which they are contained. The spaces between the two half-medallions inside a square are filled by blue lotuses (*utpalas*) whose flaring triangular profile fits finely into these spaces. Moreover, the decorated borders of the half-medallions contained in four adjacent squares are arranged in such a way that they form two S-like spiral curves crossing each other in the middle. The figure thus produced is known as the tetraskelion. This symbol is found on some of the earliest punch-marked coins of India. In Greece the tetraskelion as well as the triskelion is found engraved or embossed on shields and bucklers. The significance of both symbols is, however, difficult to ascertain. Some think the tetraskelion to be the spiral variety of the *svastika*. As the spiral arms of the tetraskelion produce an illusion of cyclic movement, others take it to symbolize the cycle of movement of the sun through the firmament, and by extension, of the movement of all astral and heavenly bodies. There could have been no doubt that the spirals of the tetraskelions have imparted an illusion of heaving and whirling movement to the whole composition of the medallion.

(4) Stepped merlons—The stepped merlons which, alternating with the blue lotuses (*utpalas*), from the upper border to the *kalpavalli* on the Coping (Pl. II) and also along the diameters of some of the half-medallions on the pillars (Pl. XX, b) may also be considered as belonging to the Geometric Style, as each of these motifs in reality consists of diminishing superimposed cubes in three, four or five tiers. When considered along with the others in the row, these motifs appear to form part of the defensive arrangement of the walls of a fortification constituting, as they do, the embattled parapet between two embrasures through which the defenders can shoot missiles or hurl stones on the assailants. The walls of the city of Kusinārā, as depicted on the Southern Gateway of Sanchi Stūpa I⁹⁰, were furnished with defensive turrets having rows of such stepped merlons through which the defenders of the city were shown hurling stones on the besieging forces marshalled below. But taken separately, each of these motifs is found to resemble a Babylonian ziggurat, and like the ziggurat appears to represent a mountain. As such the stepped merlons may be thought to represent the Primordial Hill which, as we have already stated, arose out of the Primordial Ocean in the first stage of Creation. Thus, of all the Geometric motifs found on the Bharhut Railing, the so-called "stepped merlon" appears to truly form an element of "Water Cosmology". Their alternation with the blue lotuses (*utpalas*), another element of "Water Cosmology", appears to strengthen our interpretation. Their resemblance with the Babylonian ziggurat inclines us to hold that, like the "honey-suckle", human-faced bull and winged lion etc., this motif also entered India through contact with Western Asia.

⁹⁰Marshall, J., *The Monuments of Sanchi*, Vol. II (n.d.), Pl. XV, lowermost architrave; *Guide to Sanchi*, 1918, Pl. V, b.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES

FRONTISPIECE

General view of the Bharhut Railing and *Torāṇa* as erected in the Bharhut Gallery.

The Railing (*vedikā*) is composed of a series of stone pillars or posts (*thabho*=*stambha*), rectangular in section, joined together by three parallel sets of lenticular cross-bars (*sūchi*), mortised into the pillars on either side, and capped by a continuous stone coping (*ushṇīṣha*), rounded at the top. It is pierced by four entrances on the four cardinal points, dividing it into four Quadrants. Parts of the North-eastern and South-eastern Quadrants have been re-erected in the Bharhut Gallery.

Towering high over the Railing is the Gateway (*Torāṇa*). Only the Eastern *Torāṇa* has come down to us to be re-erected in the Gallery. It is composed of two curiously shaped pillars supporting an ornamental arch, which consists of three massive volute-ended curviform architraves, placed one above the other by means of square blocks of stone *dados* posited between them in line with the supporting pillars below. The empty spaces between the central curved parts of the architraves are filled with eleven small balusters and statue-pillars.

Plate I

Inner view of the upper part of the *Torāṇa* at the Eastern entrance as erected in the Bharhut Gallery.

The two supporting pillars of the *Torāṇa* are square in section (*chaturasra padasthāna*) upto a height of 46 cm. from their base (not shown in the Plate). Above this the shafts are chiselled to form a group of four octagons (*ashṭāśra stambha*) joined together to represent a cluster of four columns. Each of these four octagons is crowned by a separate lotiform bell-capital surmounted by a circular abacus decorated all over with lotus-petal designs. Between the circular abacus and the bell there are rope mouldings. In form and design these are replicas of similar members of the Aśokan capitals. The abaci of the four-grouped bell-capitals are covered by a single square abacus, and this in turn

supports a four-grouped *Vyāḷa* (fantastic animal) emblem, showing two *vyāḷas* seated back to back on each face of a capital. On the inner face, the *vyāḷas* of one of the capitals are lions with human faces (*nara-vyāḷas*), while those of the other are the same animals with birds' faces (*kyeṇa-vyāḷas*).

The superstructure of the Torāṇa consists of three curviform architraves, the projecting volute ends of which are decorated with open-mouthed crocodiles. The central curved part of the lowermost architrave shows a procession of elephants carrying offerings of lotus flowers and buds, and a human devotee on each side of a *Bodhimāṇḍa* under a banyan tree. The central part of the middle architrave shows a similar procession of lions and human-faced *vyāḷas* approaching from either side a *Bodhimāṇḍa* under a clump of bamboos. The central part of the uppermost architrave is a reconstruction in cement plaster and its faces have been left plain. The square part of each architrave between the curved middle portion and the volute ends are decorated on the one side with the representation of a *stūpa* and on the other side with that of a pavilion or shrine. The uppermost architrave is surmounted at its centre by a pinnacle ornament consisting of a nine-petalled honey-suckle (anthemion) crowned by a Dharmachakra. In the space between the curved middle portion of the middle and lowermost architraves there are eleven balusters and statue-pillars. The similar space between the middle and uppermost architraves has been left empty due to non-availability of balusters etc. in the excavations.

The superstructure of the Torāṇa with its architraves and balusters symbolically represents the *Dharma* promulgated by the Buddha which serves as a parapeted bridge (*dharmasetu*) for the salvation of mankind from earthly bondage.

Plate II

A portion of the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing with intermediate pillars, cross-bars and coping in position.

One of the intermediate pillars (the one on the extreme left) bears the life-size figure of a Yaksha (*Supāvasa Yakho*) standing on his elephant mount. The other pillars, also intermediate ones, are divided into three sections by a full medallion at the middle and half-medallions at the top and the bottom. The medallions are decorated with sculpture showing deities (*e.g.*, *Nāgarāja* and *Nāgis*) and scenes (*e.g.*, *Worship of the Bodhi Tree*, *Dream of Queen Māyā*) from popular and Buddhist

mythology. The half-medallions at top and bottom contain animal (*jala-vṛishabha*) and floral (full-blown half-lotuses) motifs. The chamfered edges of three pillars are ornamented with male and female figures standing on lotuses, birds (parrots) perching on flowering branches and other floral motifs. The cross-bars (*sūchi*) needling the pillars are decorated with medallions containing full-blown lotuses and other floral and animal designs. One of the cross-bar medallions contain a human bust within a full-blown lotus. The continuous coping over the pillars is divided into a number of semi-circular panels formed by the meanders of the *kalpavalli*. These panels contain sculptures of natural and fantastic (*ihā-mṛiga*) animals, flowers, fruits and personal ornaments as well as scenes from the *Jātakas* and other popular tales. This broad band of coping sculpture is bordered at the top by a row of stepped merlons alternating with blue lotuses (*utpala*), and at the bottom by a row of bells hanging from the meshes of a net (*ratna-kṭhkiṭ-jāla*).

Plate III

a — Railing intermediate pillar.

It has mortices for cross-bars on its two sides, and its two faces are provided with spaces for sculptural decoration. The face shown in the Plate is decorated with a full medallion at the middle and half-medallions at top and bottom, and its edges are chamfered. All the three medallions as well as the chamfered edges are ornamented with sculpture showing men, animals and flowers etc.

b — Railing intermediate pillar, showing the life-size figure of Sirimā Devatā standing on a *vedikā* type of railing. Over her head is a half-lotus medallion from which, on either side, emerges a lotus leaf (left) and a blue lotus (right) bearing garlands or necklaces.

c — Terminus pillar of the Return Railing covering the Torāṇa. This pillar has mortices for cross-bars only on its inner side, the two faces and the outer side being reserved for life-size figures. In the illustration the figure of Gaṅgita Yaksha on the inner face and that of Virūḍhaka Yaksha on the adjacent outer side have been shown.

d — Right-hand corner pillar of the South-eastern Quadrant of the Railing. This pillar has mortices for cross-bars on its inner side and outer face, the adjacent outer side and inner face being reserved for sculptural decorations. In the illustration the horseman carrying a Garuḍa-standard

(*Garuḍa-dhvaja*) on the inner face and the elephant riders of the outer side are shown. The animals of both the side and the face are standing on *vedikā* railings supported by elephants (on the face) and Gaṇas (on the side). Half-lotus medallions decorate the top of both face and side.

Plate IV

- a — Coping sculpture (No. 346) showing a couchant elephant from whose mouth the *kalpavallī* issues out.

This is the initial sculpture (occupying the space just above the First Pillar dedicated by Chāpadevi) on the inner face of the Coping over the South-eastern Quadrant of the Railing. The elephant is couchant facing right, *i.e.*, the south, the direction to be followed by the pilgrims perambulating the *pradakṣiṇāpatha*. Its trunk is upraised; and from its mouth issues the main stem of the *kalpavallī* which, by its meanderings, divides the face of the Coping into a number of semi-circular upper and lower panels containing sculptural decorations. Along with the main stem of the *kalpavallī* there also issues from the elephant's mouth a subsidiary sprig bearing a full-blown lotus and a bud. From the body of the main stem of the *kalpavallī* issues out other subsidiary sprigs, some of which are held by the upraised trunk of the animal and some others are shown creeping backwards over its head and back. From the leaves on these subsidiary sprigs hang various ornaments, like necklaces, tassels, a spiral ear-ornament and another of the *prākāra-vapra-kunḍala* type, which surround the animal on all sides. The elephant is not caparisoned, and appears to be wild. It is very naturalistically drawn, being more so than the one depicted on the Return Coping (Pl. IV, b).

- b — Coping sculpture (No. 312) showing a couchant elephant from whose mouth the *kalpavallī* issues out.

This is the sculpture next to the initial couchant lion (fragmentary) on the inner face of the Coping over the Return in front of the Eastern Gateway. This elephant faces right, like the one depicted in Pl. IV, a; and from its mouth also issues out the stem of the *kalpavallī* dividing the face of the Return Coping into a number of similarly posited semi-circular panels for sculptures. In its upraised trunk the elephant holds a necklace (*hāra*) of three chained strands, the strands being separated by spacer beads. The animal is caparisoned, the caparison consisting of a piece of embroidered trapping covering its back and sides; and so, it appears to be a tame elephant. Its posture is also more prostrate than the one depicted on Pl. IV, a.

- c — Sculpture (No. 348) on the inner face of the Coping over the South-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing a lion.

Its body and haunches are naturalistically depicted ; but its face and the manes over its neck are schematic, and appears to be copied from West Asiatic prototypes. The animal is inside a semi-circular panel formed by the meanderings of the *kalpavalli*, from which issues a number of subsidiary sprigs each carrying a lotus bud or leaf.

- d — Sculpture (No. 325) on the inner face of the Coping over the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing a fantastic animal (*ihā-mṛiga*), inside a semi-circular panel formed by the *kalpavalli*.

The animal has a leonine body, a bird's head with parrot-like beak and asinine ears, horse-like manes over the nape of its neck and lion's tail. Its forelegs have cloven hoofs like a bovine, while its hind legs have clawed paws like a feline. In Indian *Śilpaśāstras* these hybrid animals are known as *Vyāḥas*. The animal depicted in the panel may be designated as *Śyēṇa-vyāḥa*. Ornaments, like spiral *valaya*, *prākāra-vapra-kṇḍalā* and ear-rings (?), are shown around the animal, some of them on sprigs issuing from a node of the *kalpavalli*.

Plate V

- a — Sculpture (No. 354) on the inner face of the Coping over the South-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing a fantastic animal (*ihā-mṛiga*) inside a semi-circular panel.

The animal is a human-faced lion ; but it has no mane over its neck and head. Its limbs, body and haunches have been naturalistically depicted like those of a lion. This animal appears to have its ideological prototype in the sphinxes of Egypt ; but in actual depiction it differs much from them. Two sprigs issuing from a node of the *kalpavalli* carry lotus leaves with ornaments, the one above the animal being a *pāda-valaya* (anklet), the other below it a necklace (*hāra*) of beads of four strands.

- b — Sculpture (No. 345) on the inner face of the Coping over the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing a bearded human-faced bull (*nara-vṛishabha*) inside a semi-circular panel.

This fantastic animal reminds us of the large human-faced bulls on either side of the gates of the Assyrian palaces at Nineveh and Dur Sharrukin (c. 8th century B.C.). It has, however, no wings like its

Assyrian prototypes. It should also be noted that it has no hump ; and its body resembles that of a deer more than that of a bull. Below its body a spiral *pāda-valaya* (anklet) sprouts from a lotus leaf on a sprig originating from a node of the *kalpavalli* ; two other ornaments, possibly spiral ear-rings are shown above its back.

- c — Sculpture (No. 337) on the inner face of the Coping over the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing.

This semi-circular panel shows an antelope (*mṛiga*) under a tree and a man with an axe on his shoulder. As the Brāhmī label informs us, it depicts a scene from the *Isimiga-Jātaka*. The animal tramples over a bracelet (*valaya*) ; a spiral ear-ring is also shown near the bracelet.

- d — Semi-circular panel (No. 327) on the inner face of the Coping over the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing a scene from the *Sujāta go-huta Jātaka*.

The purpose of this illustration is to show how naturalistically the Bharhut artists had depicted the couchant bull. Its couchant posture, horns, hump, ribs, and tail have been very realistically delineated. Above and below the bull are shown two spiral *valayas*, possibly *pāda-valayas*.

Plate VI

- a — Semi-circular panel (No. 329) on the inner face of the Coping over the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing the episode of the *Biḍāla-Jātaka Kukuḍa-Jātaka*.

The cock on the tree and the cat on the ground below have been very realistically as well as naturalistically drawn. Ornaments, like necklaces of beads and a large ear ornament (*kuṇḍala*) furnished with a number of bells are shown hanging from two sprigs coming out of a node of the *kalpavalli*.

- b — Semi-circular panel (No. 333) on the inner face of Coping over the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing the episode of the woman *Āshāḍhā* in the cremation ground among jackals.

The jackals are recognizably, if not realistically, depicted.

- c — Sculpture (No. 332) on the inner face of the Coping (North-eastern Quadrant), showing ornaments hanging from subsidiary sprigs inside a semi-circular panel formed by the *kalpavalli*.

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The ornaments consist of neck-chains (*hāra*), bracelet (*valaya*), ear-ornaments of *triratna*-design and a ring (*aṅguriya*) of beads.

- d* — Sculpture (No. 363) on the inner face of the Coping (South-eastern Quadrant), showing a neckband (*kaṇṭha-bhushaṇa*) hanging from the leaf of a sprig issuing out of a node of the *kalpavallī*.

Inside the neckband are two ear ornaments of the *prākāra-vapra-kunḍala* type, and outside it a ring (*aṅguriya*) of beads.

Plate VII

- a* — Semi-circular panel (No. 328) on the inner face of the Coping (North-eastern Quadrant), showing necklaces of beads hanging from the leaves of a subsidiary sprig of the *kalpavallī*. Two other circular ornaments having the shape of lotus-rosettes may be ear ornaments.
- b* — Semi-circular panel (No. 330) on the inner face of the Coping (North-eastern Quadrant), showing seven mangoes (*āmra*, *sahakāra*) hanging from a subsidiary sprig of the *kalpavallī*.
- c* — Semi-circular panel (No. 353) on the inner face of the Coping (South-eastern Quadrant), showing two jack-fruits (*panasa*) hanging from a sprig of the *kalpavallī*.
- d* — Semi-circular panel (No. 326) on the inner face of the Coping (North-eastern Quadrant), showing two custard-apples (*ātā*) hanging from a sprig of the *kalpavallī*.

Plate VIII

- a* — Corner-pillar sculpture (No. 2) showing the hybrid figure of a merman (*matsyanara*) as *vāhana* of a life-size demigod.

Though mutilated, the head of the leviathan can be recognized as that of a bearded man, the body being that of a fish or sea-serpent, curved and coiled, the tail being furnished with fish-like caudal fins.

- b* — Corner-pillar sculpture (No. 306) showing a sea-lion (*sindhu-siṃha*) as *vāhana* of the life-size figure of a lady holding the mirror (*darpaṇā*).

The head of the monster is that of a lion. Schematic manes run over its head and the nape of its neck. The forepart of its body has two forelegs which, peculiarly enough, are furnished with bovine hoofs and

not feline paws. The hind part of its body consists of the coils of a sea-serpent, and is furnished with fish-like ventral and caudal fins.

- c — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 245) showing an elephant standing on the pericarp of a lotus.

The lotus (*padma*) has been depicted as an overblown one just before fading out, with all its petals drooping down towards the stem completely exposing the stamens and the pericarp. The ease and poise with which such a huge animal as the elephant has been accommodated on the small compass of the pericarp of a lotus deserve notice.

- d — Sculpture (No. 106) on the outer face of the terminus-pillar of the North-eastern Quadrant of the Railing, showing a sea-horse (*jala-turaga*) as *vāhana* of *Chandrā Yakshi*.

The head of the animal is that of a horse with schematic manes running from the crown to the nape. It has horse-like forelegs. The rest of the body consists of the coil of a sea-serpent furnished with end-fins on the tip of the tail.

- e — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 60) showing an animal (mutilated, possibly horse) with rider standing on a lotus.

The lotus is depicted as full-blown, in the prime of its youth, with the petals pointing upwards, enclosing the pericarp which is not seen.

Plate IX

- a — Cross-bar medallion (No. 14) showing full-blown lotus.

The medallion shows the top surface of a single lotus as if it is being viewed from above. In the centre is the circular pericarp (*karṇikā*) with the ends of the carpels in position. The pericarp is surrounded by a circle of stamens which, in turn, is encircled by the spreading petals. The petals of the front row are shown in their entirety, placed side by side around the circle of stamens with their tips pointing outwards towards the circumference of the medallion. The petals of the back rows are shown peeping through the upper ends of those of the front row. The full-blown lotus is placed within a circle of flat moulding ornamented with a wavy line. Beyond this moulding is a floral border of alternating full-blown lotuses and blue lotuses (*utpalas*), the latter being shown emerging from the plants themselves consisting of roots and stems.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 58) showing a full-blown lotus.

In this medallion the petals of the front row are shown to droop and double back over the circle of stamens with their tips pointing inwards towards the central pericarp. Beyond this come other rows with their petals pointing outwards as is usual with such lotuses. The lotus is surrounded by an inner circle of beads and an outer border of encircling schroll-work.

- c* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 152) showing a full-blown lotus.

In this medallion also the petals of the first row droop and double back over the circle of stamens, and then come the usual rows of petals pointing outwards. The central lotus is surrounded by a row of larger petals which does not belong to that flower, but appears to form an ornamental device.

- d* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 79) showing a full-blown lotus.

The central lotus shown in this medallion is placed within a circle of plain flat moulding, and beyond it there is an outer border formed by a row of serpents' heads.

Plate X

- a* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 179) showing a full-blown lotus.

The pericarp of the lotus does not contain the usual carpels, but is decorated with a lotus-rosette. The flower lies within an inner border of rope moulding which may represent a wreath of twisted creeper. The outer border is formed by a meandering lotus rhizome with nodes at regular intervals from which emerge separate springs containing blue lotuses (*utpalas*) and buds.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 181) showing a full-blown lotus.

The central lotus is encircled by an inner border of rope moulding or twisted creeper-wreath. The outer border consists of a meandering vine creeper with leaves and bunches of grapes coming out of it. The vine motif appears to be introduced into India through contact with Hellenistic West Asia.

- c* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 216) showing a full-blown lotus.

The usual central lotus lies within an inner circle of twisted rope or creeper-wreath moulding. Beyond this is an outer border of stylized over-

blown lotuses (*padmas*) with their petals drooping downwards baring the stamens and the pericarp, alternating with leaves.

d — Cross-bar medallion (No. 57) showing a full-blown lotus.

The large central lotus is placed within an inner border of bead-and-reel (astragals) and an outer border floral wreath.

Plate XI

a — Fragmentary pillar medallion (No. 287) showing a full-blown lotus within a circle of plain flat moulding.

The flower is not of the usual multi-rowed variety. The single row of petals surrounding the stamens are alternated with feeler-like tentacles, the significance of which cannot be determined. Beyond the circle of moulding is a row of pecking swans in various postures, some pecking food from the ground, one pecking its tail plumes, two others confronting each other with their flat bills as if in a quarrel.

b — Cross-bar medallion (No. 90) showing a full-blown lotus.

Instead of the usual carpels, the pericarp of this beautifully executed lotus is decorated with an eight-armed skelion (*octoskelion*), the spiral arms of which impart an illusion of anti-clockwise whirling motion to the centre of the composition. The lotus lies within an inner circle of plain flat moulding. The outer border is formed by a meandering lotus rhizome coming out of an inverted Vase of Plenty (*pūrṇa-kumbha*). From nodes at regular intervals, the rhizome throws off subsidiary sprigs which have blossomed into full-blown lotuses and buds and leaves. The meandering rhizome has also created an illusion of slow clockwise movement. Thus the circular movement of the centre of the composition has been balanced by that at the circumference.

c — Cross-bar medallion (No. 64) showing a full-blown lotus.

The central lotus, of usual variety, is placed within a circle of many-stranded necklace of beads (*ratnamālā*). The outer border is formed by a row of winged lions (*sapaksha-siṃha*), their legs being in the posture of progression. As all the lions face the same direction, the right, an illusion of clockwise movement has been created around the fixity of the central pericarp of the lotus.

d — Cross-bar medallion (No. 77) showing a full-blown lotus.

In this medallion the central lotus lies within an inner circle of plain flat moulding. Beyond this is an outer row elephants carrying lotuses, leaves and buds in their trunks. Facing right, all the elephants are in a crawling posture which has imparted a slow clockwise movement to the circumference of the composition as against the fixity of the central lotus.

Plate XII

- a* — Pillar medallion (No. 23) showing lotuses (*padmas*) and blue lotuses (*utpalas*).

The centre of this medallion is occupied by a full-blown lotus, viewed from above, with the petals of its inner rows drooping over the circle of stamens and those of the outer rows spreading outwards. The central lotus is surrounded by a number of full-blown and overblown lotuses (*padmas*) and blue lotuses (*utpalas*) and leaves and buds, all on independent stems arising out of the field of the medallion. The medallion thus appears to depict a lotus pond (*padma-sarasi*) full of *padmas* and *utpalas*. In nature also the two varieties of flowers grow in the same pool.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 254) showing a lotus plant coming out of a hill.

Both full-blown and overblown varieties of the lotus (*padma*) as well as lotus leaves and buds are shown to sprout on individual stems coming out of a triangular eminence at the base of the medallion. This triangle, no doubt, represents the Primordial Hill (*giri, adri, parvata*) which, according to the earliest Indo-Aryan tradition, arose out of the Primordial Cosmic Ocean in the first stage of creation. Similarly, the lotus plant coming out of the triangle represents the Tree of Life, the immediate source of all creation, which grew out of the Primordial Hill in the second stage of creation. In the Bharhut reliefs the Tree of Life has always been depicted as a flowering lotus plant.

- c* — Fragmentary pillar medallion (No. 162) showing a full-blown lotus.

A large full-blown lotus, without any floral or animal border, covers the whole field. Row after row of petals (actually seven rows), one beyond the other, each row peeping through the interspaces of the row below, surround the innermost circle of petals which, being placed side by side around the circle of stamens, are visible in their entirety. The tips of peeping petals have made a ripple design of much beauty and novelty.

- d* — Pillar medallion (No. 250) showing full-blown lotus.

The central lotus is placed inside a circle of beads (*ratnamālā*). The outer border is formed by a meandering rhizome with nodes at regular intervals. From each node comes out a sprig blossoming into full-blown lotus (*padma*), *utpala* or leaf. That the *padma* and the *utpala* have been shown to grow in the same plant indicates that to the artists of Bharhut both the flowers symbolized the same thing, viz., the waters, the source of all creation.

Plate XIII

- a* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 102) showing a bust (male)—bearing full-blown lotus.

The male bust occupies the place of the central pericarp and part of the circle of stamens around it. Then comes a row of outward-spreading petals placed side by side. The interspaces between the pointed tips of these petals are filled by blue lotuses (*utpalas*) arising on stems.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 96) showing a bust (male)—bearing full-blown lotus.

Similar to above. The tips of petals of the outer rows are shown peeping through the interspaces of those of the first row around the circle of stamens.

- c* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 165) showing a bust (female)—bearing full-blown lotus.

The full-blown lotus, similar to above, is encircled by an inner border of plain moulding and an outer one of hatched chevrons. The female bust placed within the flower holds a lotus bud in her right hand. She may represent a *Nāyikā* holding a *līlapadma* in her hand, or a goddess of *padmahastā* Sri-Lakshmi type. The bust may also represent a sublimated portrait of the wife of the donor of the cross-bar a gentleman named *Isāna*, whose portrait also occurs on the other side of the cross-bar (Pl. XIII, *d*).

- d* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 120) showing a bust (male)—bearing full-blown lotus.

Lotus, with its double border, similar to above. The male bust inside the lotus holds an overblown lotus in his right hand. It appears to be the portrait of the gentleman *Isāna*, the donor of the cross-bar. It

was customary to embellish the *vedikās* with figures of popular gods and goddesses (like Yakshas and Yakshinis, in the role of devotees and worshippers of the *stūpa*, which represented the presence of the Buddha. The artists of Bharhut appears to avail of this opportunity to introduce the portraits of their patrons in the guise of demigods and demigoddesses paying homage to the *stūpa*. Reference may be made, in this connection, to a Greek legend which informs us how Pheidias was accused of portraying the head of his patron Pericles in the garb of Zeus on the shield of his chryselephantine image of Athena Parthenos housed in the sanctuary of the Parthenon. The custom of introducing portraits of patrons in religious architecture in the guise of accessory deities appears to be widely prevalent amongst the artists of the ancient world.

Plate XIV

- a* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 114) showing a bust (female)—bearing full-blown lotus.

The female bust inside the lotus is engaged in her toilet (possibly arranging the plaits of hair instead of putting the vermillion paint on the hair-parting as is usual in such figures) holding a mirror in her left hand. In Indian iconographic texts such figures are described as *darpaṇā*. It is interesting to note that the lady wears an *aṅkuṣa*-shaped tattoo-mark (or sandle wood-paste mark) on her left cheek just below the left eye. As the inscription on the cross-bar informs us, the bust appears to represent the portrait of the donor, the lady Pushyadevi, mother of Dharmagupta, in the guise of a *darpaṇikā* Nāyikā.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 132) showing a bust (female)—bearing full-blown lotus.

The female bust, being, no doubt, the portrait of the donor mentioned in the inscription as the mother of Setaka, holds an overblown lotus in her right hand.

- c* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 138) showing a male bust, the portrait of the donor Gosāla, within a full-blown lotus.

- d* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 200) showing a male bust, the portrait of the donor Rishirakshita, within a full-blown lotus. He holds a bunch of fruits, possibly the date palm, in his right hand.

Plate XV

- a* — Pillar medallion (No. 245) showing a bust (female)—bearing lotus.

The full-blown lotus lies within an inner border of plain flat moulding and an outer border of square beads decorated with diamond designs. The petals of the lotus are posited in such a way, each one covering part of the other in front of it, that they give an illusion of anti-clockwise whirling motion. The pericarp of the lotus contains the female bust with her hands in the act of salutation (*namaskāra* or *añjali-mudrā*). The circle of stamens around the pericarp is given the shape of a twisted-rope moulding. The identity of the lady represented by the female bust cannot be determined. She may be a Yakṣiṇī; but the lack of her facial charm inclines us to hold that in this depiction the artist made a realistic portrait of the donor's wife, who might have accompanied her husband in his pilgrimage to the Stūpa. The donor of the pillar, the horseman (*asavārika*) Sulabdhā, himself appears to be portrayed in a scene depicted on a half-medallion (top) of the same pillar (Pl. XXI, d).

b — Pillar medallion (No. 67) showing a bust (male)—bearing lotus.

The male bust within the lotus occupies the place of its pericarp and part of the circle of stamens. It has a grotesque face, decorated all over with tattoo-marks, a snub nose with broad nostrils and long conical asinine ears. The pillar being the gift of the lady Nāgasenā hailing from Pāṭali-putra, the bust cannot be taken to be the portrait of the donor. It appears to represent a Yaksha or some male deity associated with Water Cosmology, whose face has been shaped after some of the contemporary aboriginal tribal people of Central India.

c — Pillar medallion (No. 219) showing a female figure inside a roundel bordered by a flowering lotus plant.

The lady, shown upto the waist, is within a circle of plain flat moulding. Her right hand, placed on the hip (*kaṭihasta*), holds a lotus by the stalk; and her left hand, bent at the elbow, holds the braids of her plaited hair (*veṇī*). The roundel containing her figure is surrounded by a meandering lotus plant, no doubt, the Tree of Life, blossoming into overblown lotuses, buds and leaves on separate sprigs coming out of its nodes. The ends of the plant are held by the hands of a Yaksha squatting at the bottom. The squatting Yaksha is a variant of the same personage from whose mouth or navel the Plant of Life is shown to originate in other medallions of the Railing (Pl. XVII, *a* and *b*). The lady, representing the spirit residing within the lotus plant (Tree of life), is, no doubt, a popular goddess of Śrī-Lakṣmī type depicted here as *padmahastā* (holding the lotus) and *padmavāsīnī* (residing in the lotus), the lotus plant surrounding her indicating her habitat.

- d* — Pillar medallion (No. 231) showing a male bust within a full-blown lotus.

The male bust wears an elegant turban and other ornaments; its lovely face, brightened by an expression suggestive of smile, exudes a warmth of liveliness that is rarely met with in the sculpture of that age. The lotus containing the bust is surrounded by overblown lotuses (*padmas*), *utpalas* and buds, alternating with four large birds which appear to be swans. The identity of the bust cannot be determined.

Plate XVI

- a* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 89) decorated with the palmette and lotus motifs.

The floral motif, arising out of the flat border of the half-lotus at the base of the medallion, is generally taken to be a stylized form of the so-called "honey-suckle" motif. It, however, appears to be a "palmette", that is, stylized representation of the leaves of the date-palm tree, sacred to the Babylonians and Assyrians of Mesopotamia. The serrated and ribbed representations along the vertebrae of the four side-branches appear to be nothing but stylized renderings of individual leaves of the date-palm sprouting on either side, from base to tip, of its individual branches. The tentacle-like growths on either side of the length of the central stem appear to represent the process of twigs and spikes sprouting on the rhachis (*navamāñjari*) while the plant is about to bloom. Rosettes of some sort of flower blooming on slender stems occupy the spaces between the branches of the main motif. The bud-like growths flanking the branches (the one on the right is mutilated) possibly represent bunches of the date palm fruits.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 131) decorated with the palmette and lotus motifs.

In this illustration also the serrated and ribbed members of the motif stand for the leaves and branches of the date palm. But the central longish fan-like member bears the closest resemblance to a leaf of the Indian betel-nut (*guvāka*), also a member of the palm family, which it, no doubt, represents. The two bunches of flowers or fruits, flanking the central *guvāka* leaf on either side, possibly represent bunches of fruit-bearing flowers of the same tree (*guvāka-mañjari*). It thus appears that in this representation of the palmette motif the artists of Bharhut assimilated Indian elements of similar import with the original Mesopo-

tamian prototypes. Two winged horses (*valāhaka-aśva*), also of West Astatic origin, dart out, one on either side, of the serrated leaves of the date palm. The palmette arises out of the pericarp of an overblown lotus shown in three-quarter profile. This association of the palmette with the lotus, which symbolizes the waters, makes the former an element of Water Cosmology.

- c — Pillar medallion (No. 168) decorated with interlaced *svastikas* and *sauvastikas* and lines of beads (*ratnamālās*)
- d — Pillar medallion (No. 150) decorated with floral and geometric designs.

The field of the medallion is divided into a number of squares by broad straight lines running horizontally and vertically across it. Each square contains two half-lotuses inside half-medallions, whose diameters are formed by two of the opposite sides of the square housing them, their circumferences touching each other at the highest point. The spaces between the two half-medallions inside a square are filled by blue lotuses (*utpala*). The decorated borders of the half-medallions in the adjacent squares have formed intersecting spirals, producing a number of figures known as the *tetraskelion*, a spiral variety of the *svastika*. These spirals have created an illusion of heaving and whirling motion along the length and breadth of the medallion.

Plate XVII

- a — Cross-bar medallion (No. 279) showing flowering plants coming out of the navel of a squatting Yaksha.

The pot-bellied (*tupāḍila*) Yaksha is seated on his haunches at the base of the medallion. Two lotus plants, coming out of his navel, have spread their courses in opposite directions, filling the entire medallion with flowers, buds and leaves, growing on sprigs from nodes of the main stems. The stem of each plant is held by either of the Yaksha's hands, bent at the elbow and placed on the corresponding raised knee. Both *utpalas* and *padmas* of the overblown variety are shown growing on the same plant, which indicates that both the flowers symbolize the same thing, viz., the waters.

- b — Cross-bar medallion (No. 83) showing flowering plants coming out of a squatting Yaksha's mouth.

The Yaksha seated as above at the bottom of the medallion. Two lotus plants come out of his mouth, and spreading in opposite directions

cover the whole field with their sprigs, leaves, blossoms and buds. The stems of the plants are held in the Yaksha's hands as in the foregoing illustration. Only *padmas*, both of the full-blown variety showing their top surfaces and the overblown ones shown in profile, grow on the plants depicted in this medallion.

- c — Pillar medallion (No. 81) showing a *Nāgarāja* accompanied by two *Nāgis*.

The *Nāga* king stands in the human form under a canopy of five-headed snake-hood over his head. The *Nāgis*, on the other hand, have been shown in the hybrid form, in which the head and bust upto the navel are those of a woman, while the lower limbs consist of the coils of an actual serpent. Each of the *Nāgis* holds a *chawri* in one of her hands.

- d — Pillar medallion (No. 99) showing a Mithuna couple.

Each one of the pair stands, placing one leg, on an eminence that resembles the back of a tortoise. This may represent *Prajāpati* in the form of tortoise from whom the original Mithuna pair is supposed to originate.

Plate XVIII

- a — Cross-bar medallion (No. 101) showing a Full Vase (*Pūrṇaghaṭa*), with the lotus plant (Tree of Life) growing out of its mouth.

The *Pūrṇaghaṭa* is shown as a wide-mouthed globular pot having a high ring pedestal and everted rims, but no discernible neck. Its globular body is ornamented with bands of lotus-petal designs at the base and the shoulder and by a row of beads in the middle. Both *utpalas* and *padmas* of the full-blown and overblown varieties grow on the plant coming out of its mouth. On the exposed pericarp of each of the four overblown lotuses there perches a swan in the pecking posture. Full of life-giving water, from which wells up the Tree of Life bearing all sorts of animals and herbs, the *Pūrṇaghaṭa* becomes a microcosm, epitomizing the universe and the force of creation contained in it. Its globular shape is reminiscent of the globe of the earth.

- b — Cross-bar medallion (No. 113) showing *Gajalakshmi*.

The goddess is seated on the exposed pericarp of an overblown lotus arising out of a *Pūrṇaghaṭa*. A lotus springs on a sprig, this also coming out of the *Pūrṇaghaṭa*, on either side of the goddess, and an elephant, standing on each lotus, pours water over her head from an

inverted jar held by the trunk. Her hands are folded in the act of salutation (*namaskāra* or *añjali-mudrā*) as if she is offering her homage to the *stūpa*. This indicates that the presence of deities of the popular pantheon, like those belonging to Water Cosmology, was requisitioned on the Railing to serve subordinate roles as devotees and worshippers to magnify the religion of the Buddha.

c — Pillar medallion (No. 177) showing *Gajalakṣmī*.

Here the goddess is standing on the pericarp of the lotus ; otherwise the composition is similar to that of the foregoing illustration. In her left hand the goddess holds a lotus-bud by the stalk which arises out of the Full Vase below. Her right hand is placed below her left breast as if she is pressing it. Thus gesture indicates her power as a goddess of abundance of pouring nourishment at will on one and all.

d — Cross-bar medallion (No. 170) showing a *stūpa* worshipped by two male devotees, one on either side.

The hemispherical dome (*aṇḍa*) of the *stūpa* is raised on a cylindrical base or drum (*medhī*), the lower portion of which is decorated with a series of ornamented mouldings. On this cylindrical drum stands the railing (*vedikā*) which surrounds the base of the dome. The body of the dome is decorated all over with floral motifs and scroll work. On the truncated top of the dome there is a square platform on which rises the *harmikā*. The *harmikā* consists of a four-sided railing roofed by gradually expanding corbels in three tiers. The upper-most corbel is crowned by a garland-bearing umbrella (*chhatra*) raised on a shaft (*yashṭhi*). In overall appearance the *stūpa* depicted on the medallion is taller than Sanchi Stūpa I, a contemporary monument still standing. The high cylindrical drum (*medhī*) at the base and the corbels of the roof of the *harmikā* at the top are responsible for the longish appearance of the whole structure ; at the same time they have minimized the grandeur of the dome (*aṇḍa*) which, in earlier *stūpa* architecture, as exemplified by Sanchi Stūpa I, formed its most dominant member.

Plate XIX

a — Cross-bar medallion (No. 84) showing Makara.

The mythical creature is represented as having an elephant's scalp to which a crocodile's snout with parted jaws set with peg-like crocodile teeth has been engrafted. Its body resembles that of a fish and is covered with scales, but the tail is coiled like that of a serpent. It has elephantine

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forelegs and fish-like pectoral and tail fins. The upper jaw is curved upwards to form an incipient proboscis, but not the long trunk of the elephant.

- b* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 146) showing a Makara.

Similar to above, with the difference that its body is plain and smooth, and not covered with scales, and its tail is curved upwards and not coiled. Its forelegs are furnished with bovine hoofs and it has fish-like dorsal, ventral and caudal fins. It also possesses tendril-like piscine feelers on its upper snout; and three fishes are shown around its head, one of them being between its gaping jaws, as if being swallowed by it.

- c* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 137) showing a Makara.

Similar to the foregoing in almost all respects. However, its sternum resembles that of an elephant, though its forelegs possess bovine hoofs. A lotus plant with two overblown lotuses and a bud is shown issuing out of its parted jaws.

- d* — Cross-bar medallion (No. 125) showing peacocks.

The central peacock with its head-plumes (*śikhā*) and spread-out fan-tail almost covers the whole field. Two other smaller peacocks, one on either side of the central one, are shown in the pecking posture.

Plate XX

- a* — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 167) showing a full-blown half-lotus.

The semi-circular border to the half-lotus is formed by a necklace of beads of several strands, which are kept in place by regularly placed spacer beads. The horizontal border along the diameter of the half-lotus is formed by a row of hanging bells and *ratnamālas*.

- b* — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 6) showing a full-blown half-lotus.

The half-lotus is bordered by an inner semi-circle of plain flat moulding, and an outer one consisting of a row of tortoises shown in the profile. The tortoises are divided into two groups of three each by a bunch of flowers, which they are approaching from either side, one behind the other. The tortoises are very naturalistically depicted. The upper diametrical border to the lotus is formed by a row of stepped merlons in five tiers alternating with blue lotuses.

- c — Cross-bar medallion (No. 95) showing bullocks, cart and driver, all at rest.

This, no doubt, depicts the scene of an Indian village at midday during the summer season, when all nature seems to be drowsy and at rest. The event takes place by the side of a step-well depicted at the top of the medallion. The two bulls, unharnessed from their yokes, are at rest in the posture usual to them. The cart stands still. The cart driver is also enjoying a nap in the squatting position, his doubled-up knees being bound with his body by means of an *uttariya* wound round the waist and knees, to prevent him from fall while relaxing. The whole composition is charged with an air of drowsy inactivity which characterizes the summer noons of the Central Indian villages.

- d — Cross-bar medallion (No. 119) showing an elephant and monkeys.

The large elephant, occupying almost the entire field of the medallion, is walking to right in a slow gait. Five of the monkeys are riding on the elephant, three being seated on its back, one standing on one of its tusks, and the other trying to scramble over the hind parts of its body by catching hold of its trappings. Three other monkeys are accompanying the elephant on foot, playing on musical instruments like drums and the conch-shell flute. The import of the scene has not yet been determined, but all the animals have been very successfully drawn, their poses and attitudes being depicted with perfect naturalness and a warmth of charm that generates only from love for these animals. The interpenetration of figure with figure while communicating ideas, which is the essence of visual artistic compositions, has been very graphically depicted in this piece. The whole composition is suffused with a sense of the comic, with the monkey playing their pranks, and the elephant relishing with satisfaction the company of its simian associated.

Plate XXI

- a — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 92) showing a water-bull (*jala-vṛishabha*) and rams.

The mythical sea-monster has the head and bust of a bull with the horns, hump, dew-lap and forelegs with parted hoofs correctly shown. The hind part of its body consists of the coils of a sea-serpent and is furnished with dorsal, pectoral, pelvic and caudal fins. The horizontal band above the half-medallion shows two pairs of rams, the animals of each pair being seated side by side and back to back, facing opposite directions.

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- b* — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 98) showing a pair of deer and floral and linear decorations.

The two deer are seated side by side and back to back facing opposite directions. They have many-tined antlers on their heads, which shows that they are true deer and not antelopes. Two buds of some sort of flower are shown to rise above their backs. The horizontal border along the diameter of the half-medallion shows two lotus-rosettes on either side and a *svastika* in the centre. The extended arms of the *svastika* does not form right angles with the main cross-arms, but are rounded at the junction, a tendency for the arms to assume a spiral form which culminated in the sign of the *tetraskelion*.

- c* — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 218) showing a boar-hunt and two *jalebhas*.

The boar on the right is shown attacked by two dogs, one confronting it and trying to bite its snout, the other has leapt over its back and has dug its canines into the shoulder of its prey. A male or a female, holding a club in the left hand, is shown urging the dog on the left to continue the attack. The boar with its interlocking tusks and cloven hoofs has been correctly and to some extent naturalistically depicted; but it is difficult to recognize the dogs as such. These may represent some sort of wild dogs found in the forests of Central India. The upper horizontal border to the half-medallion is formed by two water-elephants (*jalebhas* or *jala-karis*) seated back to back facing opposite directions. Their heads, trunks, tusks and forelegs resemble those of the elephant, but their tails are formed by the coils of a sea-serpent and are furnished with fish-like end-fins.

- d* — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 244) showing a horse accompanied by a man and woman, and two Makaras.

The caparisoned horse is being led by a woman holding its reins and followed by a man holding a spear in the right hand. The significance of the scene is not known. It appears that the man following the horse is intended to represent the horseman (*asavārika*) Sulabdhā, the donor of the pillar according to the inscription engraved on it, and the woman his wife, who might have accompanied her husband in his pilgrimage. The profession of the donor appears to have been alluded to by showing him accompanying the horse. The upper border to the half-medallion is formed by two Makaras seated back to back facing opposite directions. These fantastic animals lack the elephantine proboscis and possess instead

gaping crocodilian snouts ; and their bodies are those of fishes furnished with lateral, ventral and caudal fins.

Plate XXII

- a* — Pillar half-medallion (top) (No. 46) showing an overblown lotus (padma) and two *utpalas*.

The overblown lotus is shown with all its petals drooping downwards completely baring its circle of stamens and the pericarp above. Its bulging contour resembles that of an Aśokan capital ; and Coomaraswamy's suggestion that the Aśokan "bell-capitals" derived their origin from some such stylized depiction of an overblown lotus may not be altogether out of the mark. The horizontal border at the top of the half-medallion is formed by a row of stylized honey-suckles (anthemia).

- b* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 157) showing on either edge a fan-tailed peacock perching on the pericarp of an overblown lotus.
- c* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 23) showing on either edge a parrot perching on a hanging branch and pecking at its fruits.
- d* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 35) showing on either edge a squirrel perched on hanging branches and nibbling at the foliage. The fruit hanging from the branch on the left is a custard-apple (*ātā*) and those on the right are mangoes (*āmra*, *sahakāra*).

Plate XXIII

- a* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 156) showing a female (left) and a male (right) figure each standing on the pericarp of an overblown lotus.

The female is holding a necklace of beads of several strands hanging overhead. The male holds his hands folded against his chest in an act of salutation.

- b* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 231) showing a female figure on either side standing on lotus.

The female on the left is standing on a full-blown lotus with its petals pointing upwards. She is engaged in breaking a bunch of Aśoka-flowers hanging from branches over head (*Aśoka-bhañjikā*). The lady on the right is standing on the exposed pericarp of an overblown lotus and she is plucking *Śāla*-flowers hanging from branches over her head. She may be designated as a *Śālabhañjikā*.

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- c — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 87) showing a male (right) and female (left), each standing on the hood of a five-headed cobra.

The female holds a bunch of *śāla*-flowers hanging overhead. She is thus in the pose of a *Śāla-bhañjikā*. The male has his hands folded against his chest in the act of salutation (*namaskāra-mudrā*). A necklace of beads in several strands is shown hanging over his head. The female standing on the Nāga-hood accords well with the *Vishṇudharmottara* description of Anantanāga with the beautiful Earth Goddess (*Prithvī*) standing on his hoods. Similarly, the male figure standing on the serpent's hood reminds us of the representations of Krishna's subduing Kāliyanāga (*Kāliya-damana*) in later Indian art.

- d — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 168) showing on either side a female figure standing on the pericarp of an overblown lotus.

The lady on the right holds a bunch of fruits or a flower-bud in her raised right hand, while the other on the left holds a ball in her right hand as if she is about to throw it. She is thus engaged in playing with the ball (*kanduka-kṛīḍā*), one of the pastimes of the *Nāyikās* described in the *Śilpasastras*. One of the finest depictions of a *Nāyikā* playing with a ball is to be found on one of the *ujjhālaka* brackets inside the *mahāmāṇḍapa* of the Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho (c. 10th century A.D.) (cf. *Ancient India*, No. 15, Pl. XXXIX, B). Beneath their secular facade these *Nāyikās* of the later temples appears to bear a deep religious and mythological significance. Thus the lady playing with the ball of the Lakshmana Temple reminds us of that episode in the legend of the Churning of the Ocean (*Samudramanṭhana*) where Vishṇu, as the enchantress Mohini, came to the place of churning, playing with a ball held in her upraised hand, in order to delude the demons and thus deprive them of their share of the nectar. We are of the opinion that the motif of "a lady playing with a ball" as shown on the earlier monuments, like Bharhut etc., made such a great appeal to the Indian artists in various media of later ages that the literary artists took their cue from the earlier artists who worked in the medium of stone.

Plate XXIV

- a — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 40, left) showing a female figure holding a mango hanging from a branch over her head.

The lady stands on the exposed pericarp of an overblown lotus. Her pendant right hand holds the end of an *uttariya* wound round her

waist. Her left hand, raised upwards, holds a mango (*sahakāra*) hanging overhead, as if she is about to pluck that fruit from the tree. She is thus playing the game (*udyāna-kṛīḍā*) of *Sahakāra-bhañjikā* ("plucking the mango-fruit"), referred to in Indian literature.

- b* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 35, right) showing a female figure under a flowering *Aśoka*-tree.

The lady stands on an overblown lotus under the bower of a flowering *Aśoka*-tree. Her left leg is placed squarely upon the exposed pericarp of the lotus below, but her right leg is entwined round the stem of the *Aśoka*-tree under which she stands. Her left hand hangs gracefully by the left side, while her raised right hand, also entwined round the stem of the same *Aśoka*-tree, holds one of its branches over her head. Her gesture is thus indicative of her embracing the *Aśoka*-tree which, according to traditional Indian belief, pines for the touch of a youthful damsel, and unless this "longing" (*dohada*) of the tree is satisfied, it cannot burst into blossoms. The lady under the bower of the tree may, therefore, be taken as a sculptural representation of the *Aśoka-dohada* motif.

- c* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 81, right) showing a female figure standing on an overblown lotus, her hands folded against her breasts in *namaskāra-mudrā*.

Whether she is taken to be a Yakshinī or a mortal woman, there is no doubt that her services have been requisitioned by the artists of Bharhut in the role of a devotee paying homage to the *stūpa*.

- d* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 129, left) showing a female figure holding lotus bud in her either hand.

The lady stands on an overblown lotus. In her gracefully pendent right hand she holds a lotus-bud by the stalk; her raised left hand also holds another lotus bud hanging on its stem over her head. The lady appears to represent a popular goddess of the *padmahastā*-Lakshmi type whose presence in the role of a subordinate deity was deemed necessary by the artists of Bharhut to magnify the religion of the Buddha.

- e* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 23, left) showing a female figure standing under a flowering lotus plant.
- f* — Pillar chamfer sculpture (No. 23, right) showing a female figure standing under a flowering lotus-plant.

The female figures depicted in the two sculptures (Pl. XXIV, *e* and *f*) are very similar in their poses and attitudes. Each of them stands on an overblown *padmapitha*; and one of the hands and legs (the right ones) of each are entwined with the stem of the plant under which the lady stands, the only difference being that while the left hand of the lady in Pl. XXIV *e*, remains gracefully pendant by her left side, that of the other (Pl. XXIV, *f*) holds a flowering branch of the plant overhead. Both the ladies are, therefore, in the *dohada* attitude, satisfying the longing (*dohada*) of the plants of their choice. Notwithstanding this, each of them may be taken to stand for that particular form of the goddess Śrī-Lakshmī which conceives her as "residing in the lotus" (*padmavāsini*, *kāmalavāsini*) or "residing in the lotus-forest" (*kāmalavana-vāsini*), the lotus plant in each case indicating the goddess's habitat. We are of the opinion that in these two sculptures the goddess herself is shown satisfying the *dohada* of the plant which shelters her.

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25	31	flower	flower
27	13	(lokuttara)	(lokuttara).
28	16	tattoo-mark	tattoo-mark
31	10	Coomaraswami	Coomaraswamy
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41	34	Śrī-Lakshmī	Śrī-Lakshmī
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70	18	tattoo-mark	tattoo-mark
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80	22	requisitioned	requisitioned

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1880	Jan	31	10:00



Frontispiece



General view of the Bharhut Railing and *Torana* as erected in the Bharhut Gallery



Upper part of the Bharhut *Torana* at the Eastern Entrance as erected in the Bharhut Gallery (inner view)



A portion of the Bharhut Railing in the Bharhut Gallery with the pillars, cross-bars and coping in position



a



b



c



d



a



b



c



d



a

b



c



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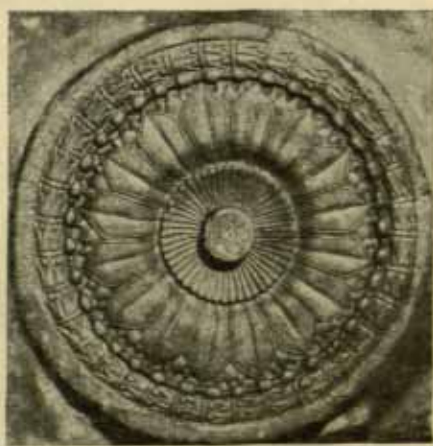
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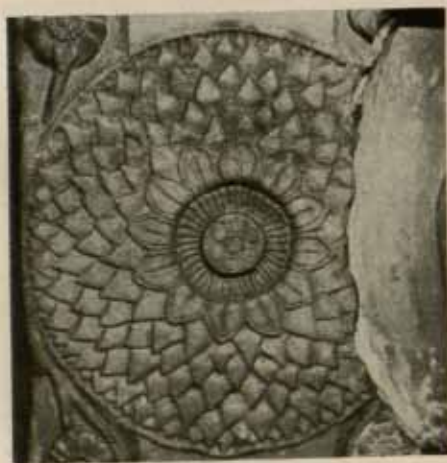
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